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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000
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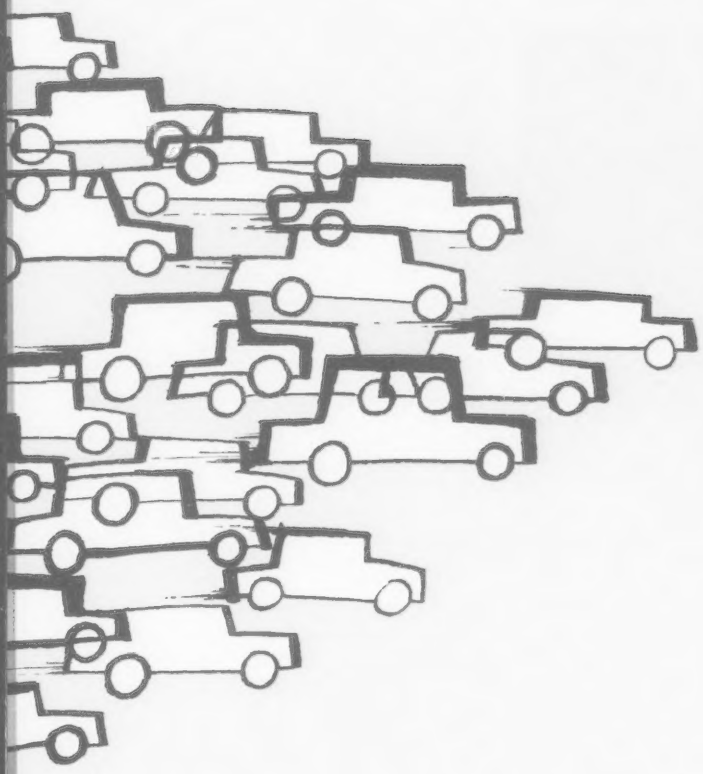
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Advertising: (212) 854-3958
Business: (212) 854-2716
Subscriptions: (888) 425-7782
Fax: (212) 854-8580
e-mail: CJR@columbia.edu

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Journalism Building
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LETTERS

PARTIAL CLEARING

In "Subpoenas — Resist, Resist, Resist," (CJR, September/October) Neil Hickey reports that the *San Diego Union-Tribune* reporter J. Harry Jones agreed to turn over unpublished notes from a jailhouse interview. In fact, he made no such agreement. Jones did provide a declaration, in response to a murder defendant's subpoena, setting forth previously unpublished statements the defendant had made in an interview. The same declaration was simultaneously published on the newspaper's Web site. It was not a great day for the First Amendment, but not as dark as your version suggests.

HAROLD W. FUSON, JR.
Vice president-Chief legal officer
The Copley Press, Inc.
La Jolla, California



NARROWED CHOICES

Andrew Kohut's recommendations in "Getting Voters to Engage" (CJR, September/October) gave good advice, but had one major flaw. "To much of the public, the candidates are virtually indistinguishable," he writes, as if this were a misperception on the part of the public. But with the exception of a few key issues, the candidates *are* indistinguishable — at least, the only two Kohut mentions, Bush and Gore. News organizations (and Kohut) should take third-party candidates more seriously and not treat them as oddities, especially those with proven track records of public service (i.e., Ralph Nader). Worldwide, parties such as the Greens, Socialists, Libertarians, and others have constituencies and hold offices. Here, the media shunt them aside unless they are rich (Ross Perot) or extremely colorful (Jesse Ventura). And, as we have seen, once they actually get coverage, they can attract enough interest to win many votes or even, in Ventura's case, get elected. If choice is a stimulant to vote, as Kohut implies, then the media need to cover the choices available — all of them.

LEE NICHOLS
Former media columnist
The Austin Chronicle
Austin, Texas

SINGULAR SUCCESS

Obviously, Brent Cunningham never heard Marvin Sleeper's advice to students at the Columbia Journalism School who would go into the newspaper business when he wrote about the *Washington Post* reporter Mike Allen ("A Compulsion to Know," CJR, July/ August).

Sleeper, a Hearst newspaper veteran who was then covering politics for the New York *Journal-American* and teaching part-time at the school, told us in 1957 to never get married or live more than a few blocks from the office. He added, however, that he had broken both rules several times.

ROBERT J. SALGADO
New Hope, Pennsylvania

RESPONSE TO HEWITT

In your July/August Letters section, *60 Minutes*' executive producer, Don Hewitt, responded to a CJR Dart that took him to task for passing along to his friends, Drs. Camran and Farr Nezhat, supporting information for a proposed *60 Minutes* exposé of alleged malpractice and research fraud by the Nezhats. In his letter, Hewitt defended the doctors, attacked me, quoted Nezhat supporters, and questioned CJR's ethics.

On June 14, 2000, two weeks before Hewitt's letter was published, the court unsealed an audit of sixteen Nezhat experimental surgeries — surgeries which had led to a recommendation that a new operation be used on some 185,000 women. On June 15, MSNBC reported that the research had been found to be "flagrantly fraudulent." On June 17, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "A review of medical records . . . found discrepancies of the highest order." On June 28, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that "in an examination of long-suppressed medical records . . . MSNBC investigation reveals that complications were not reported in medical journal articles that described a surgery [the Nezhats] invented and touted for use by physicians worldwide." Dr. Morris Wortman told the *New York Post* that Nezhat research fraud approached "medical terrorism." Dr. Art Caplan, a bioethicist, told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that the Nezhats' conduct was "incomprehensibly unethical . . . eleven on a scale of one to ten." Finally, eight years too late, the med-

ical journal *Surgical Laparoscopy and Endoscopy* agreed to alert surgeons about Nezhat research.

Among the material I provided to Hewitt had been an unpublished letter from Dr. David Grimes to the editor of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, questioning that research. Nezhat lawyers persuaded the editor not to publish the letter — on the ground that it was already in the hands of *60 Minutes*.

Hewitt's quoting of the Georgia magistrate who disqualified me is disingenuous. As I told Hewitt, following allegations by four law firms that the magistrate had colluded behind closed doors with Nezhat lawyers, the magistrate (whose law office adjoined a tattoo parlor) had been disqualified from the case and asked for a lawyer. Nezhats' lawyers — not a judge — authored the document that called me "unethical" — for requesting information about charges that Dr. Camran Nezhat had assaulted a woman physician at gunpoint. Suspicion that Nezhat lawyers wrote the magistrate's decisions illegally, unethically, and in secret, was one reason I had asked Hewitt to investigate.

In his June 3 speech to IRE, Hewitt claimed he knew "everything there was to know" about me and my "scurrilous allegations." In fact, Hewitt chose to know what he was told by his pals. Patients whose cases were compromised by witness threats — and surgeons who would have been warned about this operation two years earlier, if not for Hewitt — are owed an apology by CBS News.

JAMES J. NEAL
Hudson, Ohio

BEHOLDING BIAS

Overall, Jane Hall did a terrific job documenting the media's bad coverage of Vice President Al Gore (CJR, September/October). However, she did toe the media line on the fund-raising issue. She might have mentioned the fact that Ronald Reagan admitted in the papers that are now at his presidential library in Simi Valley, California, that he had made White House fund-raising phone calls from 1981 to 1987. No Republican member of Congress ever called for an independent counsel to investigate. The tactic of making fund-raising phone calls from the White House had been well established by the time Vice President Gore made the "no controlling legal authority" statement. In addition, Republican President Gerald Ford sent a fund-raising letter to all federal government employees asking for campaign donations and again, congressional Republicans defended Ford despite the fact that he had clearly violated the Pendleton Act. Why didn't the mainstream press report these facts?

NANCY E. KUHN
Scottsdale, Arizona

Jane Hall's article about the media being so unfair to Al Gore was a joke, right? How you can complain that the coverage the liberal media are giving your fair-haired boy is biased and lopsided? He, Gore, can do no wrong. They jump on Bush for the least small mistake in diction or syntax and deride him, make fun of him, and generally try to convey the message that he's not bright enough to be president. Maybe the real reason they attack him so is because he's too honest to be in with the Washington crowd. We all know that Clinton and Gore don't have that problem. Give us all a break and quit whining about something that just isn't happening. Gore is in bed with the media and they will protect him at all costs.

SANDY WAGNER
Houston, Texas

As a news consumer, I believe I have been defrauded by the media covering this election. Why?

Because journalists continue to rehash discredited stories about Al Gore and Love Canal, the Internet, *Love Story*, and working on his dad's farm. Every single one of these examples of serial exaggeration have been proven to be media exaggeration, not Gore exaggeration. Yet, despite corrections and debunking, they continue to be mentioned as though they are true.

Clearly the press is not holding itself accountable. There is no Journalist Licensing Board — a bad idea that would become a tool for political censorship. Candidates could sue for libel, but that would be too little too late and they would have a hard time proving malice — except against Chris Matthews, whose malice radiates from his eyes. The government cannot censor lying news reporters and shouldn't. Is there no solution?

Perhaps it's time for a desperate citizen, defrauded of the truth by the newspapers and television, to bring a civil suit for consumer fraud against the journalists who lie in their reporting. After all, there is an implicit understanding when a person subscribes to a news service that the news service will do its best to present the

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truth. In the case of Gore's exaggerations, it's clear that there is no such intent on the part of the media.

Being a civil suit by a private citizen, it's not censorship and not prevented by the First Amendment. Moreover, I don't think the First Amendment was written to allow the media to lie.

RUTHALICE ANDERSON
Portland, Oregon

HATEFUL ART

Thank you for Michael Hoyt's essay on Eminem and his apologists (CJR, September/October). The Reagan/Bush Sr. days sometimes sent me back to re-read Sinclair Lewis, for the little comfort to be found in the fact that certain American defects of character did not spring forth full-blown in the 1980s. After reading Hoyt's piece, I looked up Orwell's 1944 essay, "Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on Salvador Dali." I commend it to you, all the more because Dali's memory is presently so sanitized: hideous, hateful art did not start yesterday, either, and Orwell's response is that of an intelligent, humane observer.

MARY O'GRADY
Austin, Texas

I just read Michael Hoyt's intriguing piece on Eminem in CJR. Being about your age with no interest in rap music, it was all news to me. I went right to Amazon and ordered a couple. This may illustrate a point that bears on the subject. Reviews that say "Wow! Cool!" are a dime a dozen. Critically tut-tutting, however, is flacks' gold. I don't pretend to know what policy prescription to derive from that reality, but maybe this: If media really want to provide families more help in purifying the cultural air, ignoring the vile might be a better way than shouting "vile!" It may be that community service demands a form of self-censorship, to use a sensitive term. Dignified restraint is perhaps better. Industry insiders tell me that studio execs responsible for *The Last Temptation of Christ* were in abject despair at the final cut of that film. It dragged terribly. Financial disaster loomed. Then, a miracle happened. The Christian Right found out about it. And by dint of that alone did investors (just barely) make their money back. The social system dynamic in a free society makes the Bill Bennetts of this world de facto publicists for this stuff. People of Bennett's sophistication must know this. They simply can't help themselves. Slaves to high-mindedness, they become barkers for the pimps.

JACK SAUNDERS
San Francisco, California

SCHOOLED REPORTERS

Gene Maeroff is a fine journalist and much of what he says about education reporting is on the mark ("Expert Witness," CJR, September/October). However, I must take issue with the suggestion that education reporters are new to the beat and to journalism.

In 1997, in the midst of much criticism of the education press, the Education Writers Association asked Public Agenda to find out what the people really thought about the education press. The study also asked education reporters and editors to assess their own work.

Seventy-two percent of the education reporters surveyed had covered education for three years or more and thought education a prestigious beat in its own right. Ninety per cent had covered other beats before education. While under a third were under thirty years old — as many were over forty.

There is no doubt that there is a lot of turnover on this and other beats. However, this mythology about the education beat deserves a second look.

LISA WALKER
Executive director
Education Writers Association
Washington, D.C.

JEOPARDIZING JURORS

In your interview with Lucy Dalglish ("Everybody Is More Careful Than They Used to Be," CJR, September/October), Dalglish complains about the growing use of anonymous juries. It is worth remembering some of the events that may well have contributed to this trend. For example, on May 9, 1992, in the aftermath of the acquittal of the police officers videotaped while beating Rodney King and the subsequent violent riots triggered by the verdict, *The New York Times* published an article profiling the jury, listing all their names and home towns, and the assessed values of most of their homes. I do not think any reasonable journalistic purpose was served by this. And the jurors might have been put in physical jeopardy, given the violence of the riots.

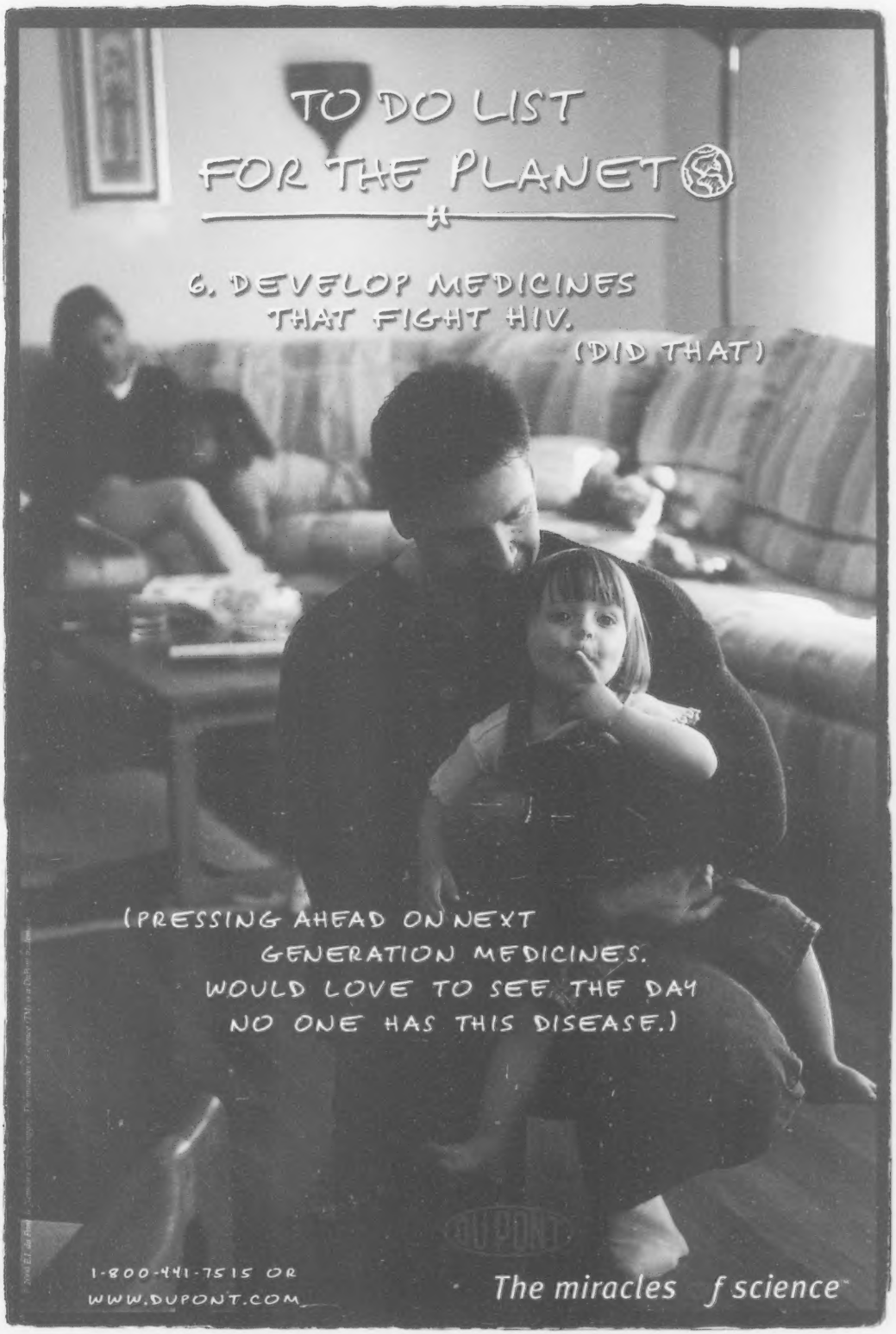
The *Times* broke no law when it published the article. But one cannot help but question its judgment. Indeed, such articles may engender fear in jurors that may interfere with the performance of their vital job in a fair and just manner.

ALEX AISEN
Carmel, Indiana

CORRECTIONS

In the September/October issue, the statement that Gannett "has never owned a local paper in a market the size of Phoenix or Indianapolis," was incorrect. The company's *Detroit News* serves a larger market.

In the July/August issue, the first name of the gorilla expert Dian Fossey was misspelled as Diane.


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COUNTERPOINT

BEYOND P.C.

BY MARY JO MELONE

Counterpoint provides an opportunity for those who disagree with what is published in CJR to express their points of view. Mary Jo Melone, a metro columnist for the *St. Petersburg Times*, responds to the September/October article by Pamela T. Newkirk, "Guess Who's Leaving the Newsrooms."

Even though I'm a columnist, and I take on big issues, head on, for a living, I'm almost afraid to write this.

I know the cheap words that might be hurled my way. White racist. Bigot.

In its last issue, CJR published a piece by Pamela T. Newkirk on black reporters quitting the business. They were tired of having the stories born of their unique experiences rejected. They were unwilling to be forced into a mindset, a way of seeing, that wasn't theirs. One of the best and the brightest, Pulitzer Prize-winner Angelo Henderson of *The Wall Street Journal*, said, "'You can't make me be like everyone else."

I've got some news for him. His story is my story.

Some years ago, I was invited to a lunch given by some of the journalists teaching at the Poynter Institute, the nonprofit center for reporters that owns the *St. Petersburg Times*. The faculty gave cheerful reports about conferences they'd just attended — conferences of black journalists, Asian-American journalists, Hispanic journalists, gay and lesbian journalists. They spoke of the story ideas they'd come away with and how impressed they were with the people they'd met.

Then I was asked to speak.

I waved a syndicated op-ed piece I'd cut out of the *Times* about the widening income gap between rich and poor. Why weren't they talking about that, I asked. Why did we have to be constantly carved up by race and ethnic group (as well as by sex)? Wasn't the world bigger than that, and the issues broader?

Silence fell. Stares followed. Maybe I had chosen the wrong moment to raise my concerns. But I didn't see these people often. I grabbed the chance I had.

Later, the black woman who had invited me took me aside and told me I had sounded angry. I was. I was in the same shoes as the Angelo Hendersons of the journalism business. I too was gripped by frustrations, although they aren't the same as his.

I want my work to prompt discussion, not name-calling. I want to write about race without my knees knocking over what my colleagues will think. I want to find new ways to talk about race, ways that are deeper and more accurate than the black-as-victims, whites-as-perpetrators mind-set cast in cement since the sixties. I want to be able to write about race without being dragged through the mill.

There was the column about the white Tampa man whose son had just had his bike stolen by a black child, how angry the father was, how ashamed of the prejudice he felt rising in his throat. The piece was held for forty-eight hours. The racial identifications of the people involved were moved from the lead to almost the bottom.

There were the columns I've written about St. Petersburg's police chief, who is black. In a city with a shameful history of race relations, he operates, in my opinion, with as much contempt for some white officers as some of his white predecessors had for blacks. This is not what I would call progress, and I have said so in print. And paid for it, in small, telling ways, including strained relations with other colleagues, black and white, who suspect my motives.

When I hear the chill in their voices, I have to fight the impulse to label them, as I suspect they have labeled me. I think of a colleague who said I knew as much about race as Archie Bunker. Or the colleague who proposed a staff meeting about my columns, because black readers he knew didn't like them and I needed to fix what I was saying.

It's hard not to take this personally. The struggle in newsrooms over race is no different than the struggle that takes place in neighborhoods and workplaces the country over. I had a black friend at the paper, gone now, who defended me to her friends. As a joke, she used to call me H.B. The initials stood for Head Bigot.

When I write about race, searching for new ways to talk about it and deeper understanding, sometimes I write well, sometimes not so well. I am subject to the same vagaries as anybody else. For my efforts, I have been accused of not being a decent, honorable human being.

And they call this diversity? ■

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CURRENTS

◆ IN REVIEW ◆

PERIPHERAL VISION AND WEN HO LEE

Investigative reporters need eyes like hawks, but they occasionally fall victim to a kind of tunnel vision that comes from straining to trace a line of logic through a forest of facts. That appears to be what happened, on the Wen Ho Lee story, to *The New York Times*.

In its extraordinary "From the Editors" note on September 26, the *Times* addressed all of the paper's coverage of the case, but the main reason for the note was its first article, BREACH AT LOS ALAMOS, a 4,000-word blockbuster on March 6, 1999, by James Risen and Jeff Gerth. Like much good investigative work, the piece made a case for serious wrongdoing and suggested a villain, an unnamed scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Two days later, when he was fired, the world learned that the scientist was an American of Taiwanese descent named Lee.

The backdrop was China's progress in making nuclear weapons smaller and thus easier to deploy, and U.S. suspicions, fortified by intelligence clues, that espionage had helped them make the leap. Leading the government's probe was Notra Trulock, then the director of intelligence at the Energy Department, which oversees Los Alamos. Trulock emerged as a central figure in the *Times* story, an embattled investigator up against politicians who wanted to minimize problems with China for policy reasons. History could prove him right; Wen Ho Lee still has a lot of explaining to do about why he downloaded sensitive files.

Yet it turns out that the assumptions that served as the story's starting point — that spying was the key to China's nuclear progress, and that this spying took place at Los Alamos — are wide open to debate. Worse, so is the troubling subtext of BREACH AT LOS ALAMOS. Some may yet argue that the story merely reported on what investigators were pursuing, but it went beyond that. It is hard to read it without thinking that readers were supposed to believe — from the way the facts were marshaled and supported by inferences and quotes — that Wen Ho Lee was a probable spy and that those in the government who doubted it were politically motivated.

Risen and Gerth included in their article the CIA's doubts that espionage was the key factor in China's progress, but that debate was subordinated. On September 7, 1999, the *Times* itself, in a 5,400-word investigation by the science writer William J. Broad, brought such doubts to the forefront. Broad found that nuclear experts "clash violently on how much was stolen and what impact it had on Beijing's advance, if any." More to the point, his reporting, Broad wrote, "bolsters a point of emerging agreement among feuding experts: that the Federal investigation focused too soon on the Los Alamos National Laboratory and one worker there, Wen Ho Lee, who was fired for security violations. The lost secrets, it now appears, were available to hundreds and perhaps thousands of individuals scattered throughout the nation's arms complex."



From the Editors

The Times and Wen Ho Lee

ew York Times report-
tigators believed China
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u of Investigation had
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breach nor initiated the case against Wen Ho Lee.
By the time our March 6 article appeared, F.B.I.
agents had been looking closely into Dr. Lee's ac-
tivities for more than three years. A bipartisan
congressional committee had already conducted
closed hearings and written a

the evidence available to the F
come the relatively permissive
wiretap in a case of such potenti
have been more prominent in t
our thinking.

By the time Broad got to the story, more sources were surely available, more discussion was public. And by now, in other media and via court documents, we've heard from people intimately familiar with the Lee case who strongly disagreed with Trulock, such as Robert Vrooman, the head of counterintelligence at Los Alamos from 1987 until 1998. Vrooman has sworn in court documents that he thinks that Wen Ho Lee made the suspect list largely because he was of Chinese ancestry, while a number of others whose access and travel history are similar, but who were not of Chinese origin, did not. And we've heard from Charles E. Washington, former acting director of counterintelligence at the Department of Energy, who has sworn in a similar declaration that he believes Notra Trulock "improperly targeted Dr. Lee due to Dr. Lee's race and national origin," and that he thought Trulock's investigation was "a fishing expedition." Whether these and other sources with doubts about Trulock's thinking (and, in Washington's case, a history of run-ins with him) were available to Gerth and Risen is not clear.

What is clear is that if reporters are focused narrowly, like hawks on a target, in an investigative piece, then editors must supply the peripheral vision. As the *Times* concedes in its note, it should not have taken six months to get a science reporter into the mix in a story about the arcane science of nuclear weaponry. The paper should have taken "a closer look" at Trulock, as well as at "the political context of the Chinese weapons debate, in which Republicans were eager to score points against the White House on China." It should have investigated hints early on that the legal case against Lee was not all that impressive. These things need not have killed the story, but they would have made it a different kind of story. Less certain, perhaps, but better.

The *Times* has steadily reached new heights in recent years, and part of the reason is that it has freed up its writers and reporters from the platoons of editors who once used to work them over and, not infrequently, stomp out any sign of originality or risk. That's healthy.

But there is a tension in investigative reporting, in particular, between the urge to marshal an argument and the need to question a story's hypothesis. Good

editors help with both, and particularly the latter. Nobody wants an on-the-one-hand, on-the-other kind of story. Nobody wants a bowl of thin oatmeal. But then nobody wants to write the kind of painful "From the Editors" note that the *Times*, to its considerable credit, published on September 26.

— *Michael Hoyt*

OUR WIRED WORLD

"WORLD EXCLUSIVE — New Zealand detectives have foiled a possible terrorist plot to target a nuclear reactor in Sydney, venue for next month's Olympic Games." So began a *New Zealand Herald* article that ran on August 26. The article buried the fact that the police raid of an Islamic command center actually had happened five months earlier. Reuters picked up the story and ran its initial report without any date at all. A producer for *NBC Nightly News*, who looked into the story after that, was told that the news made it as far as the White House Situation Room. But the CIA soon determined that the supposed crisis was something less than that. Follow-up reports began to arrive over the wires, this time including the date of the operation. Reports also explained what happened: the New Zealand police found a group of Afghani refugees involved in smuggling illegal immigrants into the country. While the police uncovered a map of Sydney that included access routes to the nuclear reactor, there was no real indication of terrorist activity. The threat wasn't really all that threatening.

— *Lauren Janis*

THEIR OWN PRIVATE IDAHO

When national public television stations aired the documentary "It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School" back in September 1999, the program ran without incident. Except in Idaho. In that state, public TV is facing a searing political assault as a result of the show that could doom the network or force it to raise millions to survive.

The Christian Right found the documentary offensive. "Idaho Public Television was trying to promote an agenda — the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle," says Henry Kulczyk, a lobbyist for the Idaho Christian Coalition.

Republican lawmakers agreed. In March, they passed an appropriation that called for monthly reviews of Idaho Public Television's programming decisions by the Idaho Board of Education. The board — the FCC licensee for the Idaho network — would decide whether to censor potentially controversial programs.

National public television advocates fired back. "Government control of public programming is antithetical to the purpose of public broadcasting," says Marilyn Mohrman-Gillis, a vice president for the Association of America's Public Television Stations, an advocacy group for PBS-affiliate stations. The 1934 Federal Communications Act, she points out, decrees that, "It is in the public interest to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities."



General manager Peter Morrill of Idaho Public TV, which must now have its programming pre-approved by a state board.

GILPIN CAMLEY

Robert Corn-Revere, a Washington, D.C., attorney representing PBS, says Idaho's program review policy violates the First Amendment. "As long as guidelines are in place that have a chilling effect on free speech, you already have a situation of prior restraint," he says.

In June, Idaho Public Television was slapped on the other cheek when the controversial documentary sparked the question: Should the state continue providing more than a quarter of Idaho Public Television's budget even though some programs offend people? The Christian Right said no. "Part of my tax dollars go to public television, whether I like the programs or not. That's absurd," says Kulczyk.

The Idaho Republican party then passed a resolution calling on the state legislature to "privatize" Idaho Public Television. According to Mel Richardson, the Republican state senator and conservative radio talk-show host who is leading the charge, that could mean an end to all state financial support for the network. Idaho Public Television would be forced to reorganize as a non-profit corporation and replace the state's $1.6 million annual support with funds from the private sector. (In Idaho, both chambers of the legislature and Governor Dirk Kempthorne are Republican. If that Republican super-majority wants to end state support for public television, Democrats don't have enough votes to stop them.)

"I'm not trying to kill public television," says Richardson. "I just don't think the state should be involved in the television business."

Idaho Public Television is trying to stay alive. Peter Morrill, the network's general manager, quickly requested and expects to receive an $80,000 grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to study what happens when networks lose their state funding. In the few states that have made a similar transition — including Vermont, Hawaii, and Florida — it has led to a loss of staff or programming, or both. Hawaii Public Television, for example, can no longer produce local shows.

Nearly 100 public-television station managers nationwide have contacted Morrill to discuss the situation. He says they fear that the Christian Coalition or other groups could target other PBS affiliates in the future over a similar issue.

In an August 14 letter, Corn-Revere urged the Idaho Board of Education to reconsider its program review policy or face a "legal confrontation." In the meantime, the board continues to preview programming schedules for Idaho Public Television. It has not censored any programs . . . yet.

— Stephen Stuebner

Stuebner is a free-lance writer who lives in Boise.

CURRENTS

VERBATIM

SCOOPED

"This is the one time I wasn't so upset to be beaten by Bloomberg on a story."

— Rick Stein, managing editor of Dow Jones News Service, in The Washington Post, *on Bloomberg's reporting of the bogus press release that sent Emulex Corp.'s stock plummeting by 62 percent within minutes.*

THE BIG TIME

Bush: "There's Adam Clymer, major-league asshole from *The New York Times*."
Cheney: "Oh, yeah. He is, big time."

— The candidates as overheard through an open microphone after a rally in Naperville, Illinois.

"One smart-aleck answer occurred to me. Since we were not too far from Wrigley Field, I thought of saying something like, 'At least I didn't trade Sammy Sosa.'"

— From Adam Clymer's article about the Bush/Cheney slam in The New York Times Week in Review.

LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON

". . . Now we've found that others appear to be spending the afternoon hours on the Internet, for the purposes of sexual recreation . . . . So, due to this latest problem, we'll be randomly auditing computer usage in the future . . . . I hate like heck to do this. It seems kind of creepy. It seems like a waste of my time. But the repeated problems have forced our hand . . ."

— From a staff newsletter distributed by George Rodrigue, executive editor at The Press-Enterprise *in Riverside, California.*

COLOMBIA: OPTING OUT

With the U.S. ready to pump more than $1 billion in aid to Colombia to fight the drug trade and the leftist rebels who benefit from it, the civil war there has become one of the hottest stories in the hemisphere. So why don't more journalists want to go?

Partly because the situation there continues to deteriorate. Clifford Krauss, a *New York Times* reporter who spent ten years covering Central America and who was shot in El Salvador, opted not to take a position as *Times* correspondent in Colombia this summer, largely for security reasons. "One has to evaluate everything that's going on in your life, your professional life and your personal life, and whether the risk is worth it," Krauss says. "I decided: I don't need this; I don't need the glory." The *Times* has yet to name a Colombia correspondent.

Between April and July of this year, five Western journalists left Colombia with their families, including four bureau chiefs. Their replacements have been slow to arrive. One reason is that the forty-year-old civil war has evolved into a battle of attrition, with ransom money from kidnappings providing much of the financial backing. According to an official (and conservative) estimate, there were about 3,000 kidnappings in the country last year alone.

Almost half of the kidnappings are committed by ordinary criminals, not the leftist rebels or rightist militias. In large measure because of the war, Colombia has entered a period of lawlessness. The country has one of the highest murder rates in the world; 97 percent of all its crimes go unpunished.

Threats to foreign reporters pale next to the threats to Colombian journalists. Five of them were murdered in the line of duty in 1999, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, which is investigating three more deaths so far this year. At least thirteen others have fled the country under death threats. No U.S. journalist has been kidnapped or killed.



Tim Johnson

Still, the atmosphere is nerve-racking, particularly for those with families. "How tightly do I hold my three-year-old daughter's hand in the street? Trust me. Almost tight enough to hurt," wrote Tim Johnson, a *Miami Herald* correspondent, in a farewell-to-Colombia article published in August. "Many mornings, I walk her a half block from the *Herald*'s bureau to a day care. It's not a relaxing stroll. Bodyguards of other parents hover at the gates. Their jackets bulge with hidden guns. No one smiles except the children."

Last year, an assailant slipped up behind Johnson's wife in a supermarket and drugged her with what doctors later determined to be a narcotic spray. The motive is unclear, and she escaped unharmed.

Johnson's replacement, Juan Tamayo, opted to leave his family in Miami. *The Washington Post*'s new correspondent in the region, Scott Wilson, will have his family and home in Caracas. Tod Robberson, Latin America bureau chief for *The Dallas Morning News*, left Bogota in 1998 with his wife and young daughter for Panama after just eighteen months. "We thought taxi drivers were scoping us out," Robberson explained. "There was one that knew all about our daughter."

Robberson covered the Iran-Iraq war as well as the conflict in Lebanon and the gulf war. The veteran journalist was even kidnapped and held at gunpoint in Beirut before escaping. Still, Colombia unnerved him. Just before his departure someone shined a laser pen into his kitchen window, sending him to the floor and his wife and daughter scrambling behind the refrigerator, until they realized it was a child playing a trick.

A number of journalists, foreign and domestic, do stay and work in Colombia. About ten stringers regularly file to U.S. news outlets alone, and several news organizations have bureaus in Bogota, including The Associated Press, Reuters, Dow Jones, BridgeNews, and Bloomberg. Because of the massive flow of U.S. aid and firepower, some of those bureaus are bracing themselves for an escalation of the conflict. One recently reinforced its offices with new surveillance cameras, two-inch-thick glass at the reception area to withstand gunfire, and special film around the windows to absorb a blast.

— Steven Dudley

Dudley lives in Bogota, where he reports for The Washington Post *and National Public Radio, among others.*

MIAMI HERALD

A WHISTLE IS HEARD



Jane Akre and Steve Wilson in Tampa: partial victory

What happens when a television investigative reporter threatens to send the Federal Communications Commission after her employer and then loses her job? If you're Jane Akre, late of Fox-owned WTVT in Tampa, Florida, you win a $425,000 jury award in what many believe to be the first whistleblower case ever brought by a reporter against a media company over news content.

In late 1996 and early 1997, Akre and her journalist-husband Steve Wilson were working on a series about a bovine growth hormone manufactured by Monsanto that increases cows' milk production. In the midst of their reporting, Monsanto sent two letters to Fox calling for a review of the couple's project.

That set off a contentious evaluation of Akre and Wilson's research. They declared they were being pressured to distort their piece. WTVT accused them of insubordination. They threatened to report the station to the FCC. WTVT later opted not to renew their contracts, and ran its own piece on the hormone.

In April 1998, the couple sued WTVT under Florida's whistleblower law. Their claim: WTVT had fired them because they'd threatened to go to the FCC. In August, the jury found for Akre, but rejected Wilson's claim. Both Fox and Wilson are contesting the outcome of the trial. Akre and Wilson say they still intend to lodge a complaint with the FCC.

An FCC staff attorney points out to CJR that the commission does have leverage on licensees found by the agency to have deliberately distorted the news. He cited a 1998 United States Court of Appeals decision, *Serafyn* v. *FCC*, stating that the FCC is required to analyze the evidence when someone files a petition complaining of deliberate news distortion. The disciplinary options in the FCC's arsenal, says the lawyer, include everything from "writing a letter admonishing the licensee, to initiating a proceeding to determine whether a license should be revoked, to calling for early renewal of a license, which the FCC could then decide to reject."

Fox has maintained throughout the dispute that it did not pressure the couple to distort their report. Monsanto insists that its product is safe.

— Geanne Rosenberg

Rosenberg teaches journalism at Baruch College.

LANGUAGE CORNER

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

Jane Greer of Bismarck, North Dakota, an e-mail friend of Language Corner and a poet and lifelong "word dog," was struck by seemingly odd omissions of the word "that."

"People insist," she said, "that in college writing classes, adult-ed classes, and professional training classes, instructors are *telling* them to excise the poor little bugger."

An aversion to "that" does seem conspicuous of late in the public prints, presumably because of a knee-jerk obsession with saving words. Consider this, about a company named Aristotle:

"With promises like that, it is not surprising Aristotle, which was started in 1983 . . ."

What is not surprising Aristotle? Oops! They didn't mean it that way; they meant it was not surprising *that* Aristotle did such and such.

Usually, "that" isn't necessary with "say" in any of its forms. The word is wanted, though, with many other words of saying — report, announce, insist, suggest, show, declare, and others — and in constructions like the Aristotle passage above. It adds idiomatic roundness and more importantly, as we've seen, can avoid momentary but irritating confusion. Delete "that" in Ms. Greer's sentence beginning "People insist," and the reader is misled into thinking that people insist (something) in college writing classes. That's not what Ms. Greer meant.

Is there a campaign to get rid of "that," no matter the cost in euphony and clarity? Maybe so, and maybe if we're alert we can stop it.

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing right is in Language Corner *at* CJR*'s Web site, www.cjr.org.*

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PRINT JOURNALISM & "CARTOONING WITH A CONSCIENCE"

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ENTRIES SHOULD BE RECEIVED BY JAN. 15, 2001

Entry fees (per submission): For-profit publications, circ. over 100,000: $35; under 100,000: $10; non-profit publications: no fee.

For entry form and background on the award, go to *http://filmmedia.hunter.cuny.edu/aronson.htm*

Submit 12 copies of the entry to Aronson Award, Dept. of Film & Media Studies, Hunter College, 695 Park Ave., NY, NY 10021. Tel: 212/772-5041; Email: *pparisi@hunter.cuny.edu*

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CURRENTS



On September 21, a page-one photo in *Vecernje Novosti*, a Belgrade state-controlled daily, showed the crowd at a pro-Milosevic rally in Montenegro. But either the photo at least doubled the crowd size or the rally was attended by an unusual number of twins. The real crowds showed up in October, when protesters took to the streets and successfully demanded that Milosevic go.

♦ PREVIEW ♦

CONSOLIDATION I

Students of big-media consolidation might want to keep an eye on a new media/old media merger in a subset of journalism, the gay press. In March, five-year-old PlanetOut.com, the largest online service targeting gay men and lesbians, announced that it planned to merge with the largest print-based gay publisher, Liberation Publications, Inc. Los Angeles-based Liberation prints the nationally circulated *Advocate* and *Out*, among other magazines, and owns Alyson Books, the largest publisher of gay books.

Some people in the gay community worry that the diversity of voices in the gay press is already limited, and may be further constricted by a monopoly owner's corporate culture. Despite a smattering of brown-skinned faces, women, an occasional individual older than fifty, and perhaps a cowboy or two to signify gay life outside the big city, the national gay media already tend to portray an overwhelmingly white, male, urban, upper middle class vision of gay life. "I think PlanetOut runs the risk of representing a very narrow — and wealthy — segment of the community," says Ginny Apuzzo, a veteran lesbian activist.

Even in local communities, smaller media properties are being bought up by large companies. Alexandra Chasin, author of *Selling Out*, a recent book about the transformation of the gay movement into a "niche market," calls gay media consolidations "frightening" because of the possibility of further reducing diversity in the gay media.

PlanetOut says the merger is a wise economic move that will strengthen both its magazines and the Web site. The individual parts of the new company, says PlanetOut's c.o.o., Susan Schuman, "will still have their own staff, their own mission, and voice." The new company's editorial director, Judy Wieder, also editor-in-chief of *The Advocate*, says there is "no monolithic point of view" and "people shouldn't worry about this."

But people should probably keep an eye on it.

— John-Manuel Andriote

CONSOLIDATION II

Expect more consolidations and public outcry in Canada as its media moguls strive to forge new strategic alliances and reduce competition. Since mid-summer, a spate of sudden convergence plays has marginalized many media companies that didn't get in on the game.

When several announced mergers get government approval, look for the media moguls to demand relaxation of laws that limit foreign — read U.S. — ownership of Canadian media firms. Then you'll see some really big deals.

— Don Townson



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DARTS & . . .

PIECE OF PLASTIC

"Visa — It's everywhere you want to be," is the credit-card company's familiar slogan. And where Visa wanted to be this summer was on the op-ed pages of the nation's press, trying to marshal public opinion against a Justice Department lawsuit charging Visa (and MasterCard) with stifling competition. So it came to pass that just such a piece, written under the byline of Susan Molinari, appeared in the *New York Post*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press & Dispatch*, *The Des Moines Register*, and *The Dayton Daily News*. In all four papers, Molinari, a former Republican congresswoman from New York, was identified as "the national chairperson for Americans for Consumer Education and Competition." Left unnoted: that Molinari is a registered lobbyist for ACEC, and that the founder and major funder of ACEC is . . . Visa. (The conflict of interest was later reported to readers by the *Register* and *Daily News*, but readers of the *Post* and *Pioneer Press* had no such luck.)

THE INS & OUTS OF GATEKEEPING

Infinite is the variety of answers to the eternal question, "What is news?"

To the *Northwest Arkansas Times* — bought last year by Community Publishers, Inc., whose majority stockholder is the son of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton — news is a Wal-Mart circular tucked inside the paper, deemed sufficiently worthy of a page-one notice, right up there next to the *Times*'s flag.

To the *Tallahassee Democrat*, it's an enthusiastic forty-six-column-inch (including three four-color photos) report in its Sunday, August 13, metro section promoting an "Ultimate Yard Sale" at the mall, a money-making enterprise sponsored (and advertised) by the *Tallahassee Democrat* ("Individual Booth — $35").

And to *The Miami Herald*, news is a starry-eyed, sixteen-paragraph, three-photo profile, written by Paul Anger, publisher of the paper's Broward edition, of its new advertising sales manager — her family background, schooling, career highlights, hobbies, and favorite authors (*Herald* columnists Carl Hiaasen and Dave Barry, over whom she laughs "out loud.") An accompanying box was headed HOW TO REACH HER.

On the other hand, to Radio Marti, the Miami-based station funded by the U.S. government to provide propaganda-free news to Cuba, the federal raid to seize Elián González from the home of his Miami relatives was such unwelcome news that for four long hours, it wasn't. (According to later disclosures by Miami's alternative *New Times*, station director Roberto Rodriguez-Tejero had made himself scarce rather than participate in chronicling an act he disapproved of, leaving the abandoned staff in a state of temporary paralysis.)

SCANDALOUS QUESTION

To "moderate," according to Webster's, is to "keep within bounds." That definition, however, can hardly be applied to the performance of NBC's Tim Russert in his role as moderator of the September 13 televised debate between the Democratic and Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate from New York. Twenty minutes into the hour Russert pitched a question to Hillary Clinton that was breathtakingly out of bounds. Confronting her with a replay of her interview on the *Today* show in January 1998 — an interview in which the first lady had loyally backed her husband's initial denials of an affair with Monica Lewinsky and suggested that right-wing enemies were orchestrating the scandal — Russert first asked the senatorial candidate, "Do you regret misleading the American people?" then went on to challenge her thusly: "In that same interview you said that those who were criticizing the president were part of a vast right-wing conspiracy. Amongst those eventually criticizing the president were Joe Lieberman. Would you now apologize for branding people as part of a vast right-wing conspiracy?" So gratuitous was the exhumation of an incident that most of the American people had long laid to rest; so specious was the logic of lumping together "critics," "Joe Lieberman," and "vast right-wing conspiracy"; so inappropriate was the question to the event at hand, that a viewer could only puzzle over Russert's judgment in raising the issue. In any case, whether Clinton or Lazio won that debate was anybody's guess. Far more obvious was that Russert — and journalism — lost.

DETECTIVE STORIES

Media alert! Be on the lookout for a male freelancer, writing under the byline Mark Crawford, suspected of journalistic counterfeiting. Last seen in Cleveland; priors in Sacramento and Madison, Wisconsin, and, as he brags in his story pitches to editors, three other cities as well. M.O.: writer lands assignments with publications all around the country for a story on the local private investigations business, then delivers to each editor the same, ever-so-slightly adapted piece, apparently hanging local names on amazingly identical quotes. Typical telltale clues: " 'Clients have a preconceived notion about surveillance from TV — it's not just sitting around in a car eating chips and drinking coffee,' laughs Gary Meech" in *Cleveland Free Times*, February 23-29, 2000; ". . . laughs Mike Atwood" in *Sacramento Magazine*, January 1999; ". . . says Henry Curran" in *Madison Magazine*, July 1997. " 'Attorneys who use PIs win more cases than those who don't,' states PI Ron Gleisser" (*Cleveland Free Times*); ". . . says PI June Waugh" (*Sacramento*); and — a particularly nice touch — ". . . one PI" (*Madison*) who spoke "on condition of anonymity." And so on.

. . . LAURELS

TREADING LOUDLY

Somehow, all those horrific tire blowouts on the country's highways, all those quiet lawsuits in the country's courtrooms (in which tiremakers routinely pinned the blame on drivers), went practically unnoticed, perceived by press and public and regulators alike as unfortunate, isolated incidents. Until, that is, Anna Werner, an investigative reporter for KHOU-TV, the CBS affiliate in Houston, got on the case. Beginning with a ten-minute segment on February 7, Werner exposed a sinister link between numerous fatal accidents, in Texas and beyond, and Ford Explorers equipped with Firestone ATX radial tires. Other reporters, notably Mark Skertic of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, elaborated further on the crucial questions Werner raised. Skertic's series (April 30, May 1), based on a review of thirty years of government-ordered recalls and court records, tracked the breakdown of a service-bulletin system that should have alerted the federal safety agency to the deadly tire problems; the series also documented the extraordinary ease with which sued tiremakers have managed to keep the records sealed, the settlements confidential, and even the courtrooms closed to spectators. By late July, the recalls and replacements, the finger-pointings and mea culpas, the calls for hearings and demands for reform, had begun moving into high gear. At summer's end, no end of the road was in sight.

JOURNALISTIC MITZVAH

Public beratement, private pressure, advertiser ultimatums — such is the usual scenario when an ethnic news organization exposes a scandal within the ethnic community it serves. And so it was for New York's *Jewish Week*, whose June 23 edition carried a disturbing front-page special report. "Stolen Innocence," by editor and publisher Gary Rosenblatt, documented a long and longtime record of allegations that Rabbi Baruch Lanner, a revered educator in the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations who worked closely with its teenage members for more than three decades, had sexually, emotionally, and physically harassed and abused scores of youngsters in his care. More unnerving — and embarrassing — still, was the further revelation that the Orthodox Union, fully aware of Lanner's behavior, had chosen to avert its gaze. On learning of the newspaper's investigation — which included dozens of on-the-record interviews with Lanner's victims — OU officials, invoking the Jewish law against "malicious gossip," pressed Rosenblatt to keep the matter private. But Rosenblatt's better journalistic angel prevailed, and *Jewish Week* went to press. This is what happened after that: the OU forced the rabbi to resign as director of regions of its youth organization, and commissioned an independent inquiry; two congregations suspended their OU membership in protest of the cover-up; more victims came forward and filed complaints with local prosecutors; two rabbis used their pulpits to castigate the paper; a major advertiser threatened to lead a boycott; and readers showered *Jewish Week* with letters of praise.

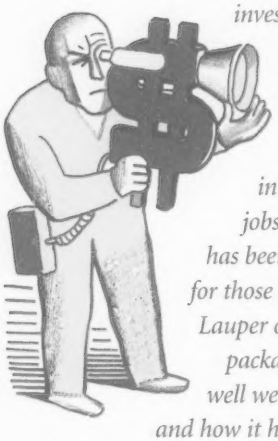
INVESTIGATIVE VOYAGE

In 1994, Eric Longabardi, a television producer in Los Angeles, got an unexpected tip: a former sailor was claiming to have been exposed to chemical tests while serving on the USS *Navarro* in Hawaii in 1963. Skeptical but intrigued, Longabardi set off on an uncharted course. It took him from deck logs (obtained from the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C.) that vaguely mentioned something called "Autumn Gold Test"; to the Navy's operational orders for "Operation Autumn Gold" (obtained through the FOIA) that referred to the Deseret Test Center in Salt Lake City (home of the testing program for secret biological and chemical warfare); to heavily censored military documents that sent the *Navarro*, along with three other ships, on a cruise to Hawaii to be secretly sprayed there with bacteria; to the Internet, whose Naval reunion Web sites helped him locate the crewmen who'd been used as unwitting guinea pigs; to the Defense Department, the Army, and the Navy, whose responses to Longabardi ranged from silence to insistence that the documents he sought were classified, could not be found, or did not exist; and to a source who unearthed a reel of footage of the test (which Longabardi managed to obtain only through a 1995 presidential executive order mandating the declassification of records twenty-five years old or older). This spring, thirty-seven years after the secret germ-warfare test and six years after Longabardi's probe began, *CBS Evening News*, with which he is now associated, aired the story. Reported by correspondent Vince Gonzales and produced by Longabardi and Barbara Pierce, the series (May 15,16) demanded answers to questions of crucial concern today: Which men on what ships were subjected to what chemical experiments, and with what possible health effects? In early September, prodded by the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide those facts, the Pentagon got reluctantly on board.

CIVICS LESSON

Sometimes the apple *does* fall far from the tree — and a good thing, too. Seven of NBC's thirteen owned-and-operated stations — WRC, Washington; WTVJ, Miami; WCMH, Columbus; KXAS, Dallas; WJAR, Providence; WACN, Raleigh; and WVTM, Birmingham — chose not to follow in their parent's footsteps when it came to the choice between private and public interest. Instead of running with the money-making baseball playoff on October 3, the stations opted to carry the first presidential debate live from Massachusetts in prime commercial-free time.

The Darts & Laurels column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.



If you had a spare $1,000 back in August 1982 and invested it in, say, Hewlett-Packard, you could have sold your shares in mid-October for about $20,000. (Oh, well.) The Dow rose some 9,500 points in that remarkable period. The real economy, meanwhile, roared in harmony with the markets, churning out jobs and wealth. The result, for some Americans, has been more security and expanded dreams and, for those at the top, untold riches. Money, as Cyndi Lauper once explained, changes everything. In the package of stories that follows, CJR explores how well we journalists have covered this age of money, and how it has changed what we do.

Business Reporting: Behind the Curve

BY DIANA B. HENRIQUES

In 1980, I was working in New Jersey as an investigative reporter at *The Trenton Times*, trying to unravel the local angles of the FBI's wacky "Abscam" sting, in which members of Congress were secretly filmed accepting bribes from undercover agents posing as aides to an Arab sheik. One of my closest friends, Jaye Scholl, was covering Princeton, the Gold Coast of the *Times*'s distribution area. Zoning disputes, election campaigns, corruption scandals, local tax rates, and the battle over casino gambling — these were the nuts and bolts of hard news as we knew it.

But within the year, more by default than by design, Jaye had become a business journalist. "I knew nothing about business, but they had posted the job and nobody else wanted it," she recalls. Almost overnight, she became business editor, dealing with financially challenged colleagues who would say things like "I've never read a prime-rate story and I never intend to."

DAVID SUTER

At the time, the prime rate — the interest rate banks charge their best corporate customers — was skyrocketing. Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker was waging all-out war against inflation. In the resulting recession, local manufacturing plants were cutting back. Labor unions were reeling from job losses. Local department stores were closing, and statewide banks were shaky. "It looked like the plug had been pulled on New Jersey," Jaye says, looking back.

Pretty dramatic stuff. Nevertheless, most of us in that long-ago newsroom still thought that Jaye had lost her mind to give up one of the most prestigious beats on the paper to cover business. To us, business reporters were candidates for retirement or permanent inebriation, whichever came first. Jaye, on the other hand, was young, smart, and ambitious.

And slightly ahead of the curve, as usual. By the end of 1982, I too was a business reporter, covering the Latin American debt crisis for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Jaye, now the West Coast editor for *Barron's* magazine, and I were part of a migration that began slowly and has since become a thunderous stampede. The media monitor Dean Rotbart estimates there were only a few thousand business journalists in 1980. When his newsletter, *TJFR Business News Reporter*, first counted noses in 1988, there were about 4,200 of us in the top fifty newspaper markets and at national business publications. And today, at those same newspapers and magazines, on television and on the Web? "Clearly over 12,000," Rotbart says.

Of course, by 1980, some of the nation's giant metropolitan newspapers had already dramatically expanded their commitment to business news — or, at least, to economic news. Hobart Rowan, recruited from *Newsweek* by Ben Bradlee, had begun to beef up *The Washington Post*'s meager business section by the mid-1960s. John F. Lawrence, a twelve-year veteran of *The Wall Street Journal*, became financial editor of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1968, bringing along a young *Journal* investigative reporter named Paul E. Steiger to help him (Steiger is now the *Journal*'s managing editor). In 1978, *The New York Times* unveiled one of the nation's first standalone business sections, Business Day, under the direction of John M. Lee, who had been the paper's financial correspondent in London and bureau chief in Tokyo before becoming business editor in 1976.

"There had been a huge explosion of economic news in the 1970s," Lee recalls, citing President Nixon's wage-price controls in 1971, the Arab oil embargo in 1973, and the turmoil on Wall Street after 1975, when regulators banned high, fixed trading commissions. "The ground was ripe for the move."

That may have been evident from Lee's lofty vantage point, but down on the vast prairie of American journalism, it took a few more years before business news attracted much attention. And when change finally came, it seemed to me that a lot of us newcomers were constantly preparing to fight the last war.

Trained on political news beats, we were utterly unprepared to cover the economic legacy of the 1970s. Before we had memorized all the members of

ge of MONEY

OPEC, the next "war" was upon us — Volcker's campaign to curb inflation. This demanded something new: a vocabulary capable of explaining the deadly mismatch between the borrowing and lending rates at banks and savings and loans, a grasp of the relationship between risk and reward, and at least a rudimentary idea of who regulated banks, S&L's, money market funds, and insurance annuities. It was not our finest hour, to say the least. Extravagant thrifts were a local story; the legislation that permitted their folly was a congressional story; the understaffed agency trying to police them was an arcane trade-press story; and the occasional financial analyst who noticed that S&L stocks were imploding was a Wall Street story. It took us far too long to connect the dots.

And as we scrambled to cover the S&L industry's collapse, the emphasis shifted again and our morning news quiz suddenly was on corporate governance — hostile takeovers, mergers and acquisitions, all exposing how little we knew about the duties of corporate directors, the etiquette of proxy fights and the rules that governed corporate raiders. Struggling to decipher unfamiliar proxy statements and 13-D's — and to understand how we ourselves could be manipulated in these takeover fights — we were blindsided by globalization. How could a sneeze in Bangkok become pneumonia in Moscow or São Paulo — and galloping consumption in some American mutual funds?

Ready at last to be tested on globalization, we found the exam actually was about the speed-of-light technology that is changing the way people work, communicate, trade stocks, conduct advertising campaigns, buy and sell nearly everything and, incidentally, gather their daily news. (What's waiting to blindside us next? My guess is it will be old-fashioned politics, our long-forgotten starting point, as grass roots movements rise up to challenge corporate power and Congress grows testy over medicine prices, media violence, and unsafe tires.)

The bright side of this frantic, learn-on-the-fly journey has been that each working day brought a new opportunity to stretch and grow. Any journalist who feels stale and unchallenged after covering the last twenty years of business news should consider a new career leading amateur Everest expeditions. But for me, a less satisfying consequence of our odyssey is that we have been constantly climbing up the steep left-hand slope of the learning curve. Our early ignorance made skepticism and independent analysis difficult. And too often, before we could get around to producing the lucid, profoundly informed pieces that are the joy of the learning curve's summit, we were once again in unfamiliar territory.

Technology, most of all, is rocking the boat from which we are trying to cover it. No longer mere journalists, some of us are now "multi-media content providers." In 1980, searching the archives meant leafing through fat envelopes of fragile clippings; today, everybody's old stories are a double-click away. Back then, the only way I could file a story from outside the newsroom was to dictate it over a public telephone to some rewrite person. Today, I dictate my stories to the voice-recognition software installed on my laptop computer and file them by e-mail, checking in on my cellular phone later to see if the copy desk has questions.

On good days, I believe that this remarkable twenty-year boom in business news has produced a financial press corps of unparalleled depth and breadth, and that today's technology is simply empowering us to do more, better, faster. Not everyone agrees, of course. Dean Rotbart shakes his head over today's army of business journalists: "There are a lot of unqualified people among that 12,000." Well, let us say, less experienced, at least. Many business publications, especially personal finance magazines and local newspapers, are struggling with the expansion-team syndrome — there are only so many good shortstops to go around. What do you do? You hire young, and hope. Meanwhile, your seasoned all-stars are getting hired away by the major leagues. The result, says Rotbart, is that "at the upper level, where competition is

TIMELINE

1970 Louis Rukeyser starts *Wall Street Week* on PBS

1971 President Nixon imposes wage-price controls

1972 *Money* magazine is founded

1973 Arab oil embargo sends fuel prices climbing

1978 *The New York Times* unveils Business Day

1979 Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker launches his anti-inflation campaign, and recession follows

1980 CNN introduces *Moneyline with Lou Dobbs*

1981 The Financial News Network goes on the air. Michael Bloomberg leaves Salomon Brothers to start his own financial information service. *Nightly Business Report* airs nationally on PBS

1982 After more than a decade of lackluster trading, the stock market begins a historic rally

1984 *The Wall Street Journal* reveals that regulators are investigating a staffer, R. Foster Winans, for tipping traders in advance to news in the paper's "Heard on the Street" column. *Adam Smith's Money World* launches on PBS

1985 Winans and two others are convicted on federal fraud charges

continued on p.20

1987 The October market crash jolts, but does not deter, a nation of neophyte investors

1989 CNBC is launched, catering to a growing interest in stocks; Bloomberg starts a wire service to compete with Reuters and Dow Jones

1991 Dow Jones Industrial Average exceeds 3,000 for the first time. The Financial News Network files for bankruptcy

1992 Dow Jones and Hearst join forces to publish *Smart Money*, a personal finance magazine

1995 CNNfn is launched

1996 A record number of new personal finance magazines — twenty-two of them — are introduced. Financial news Web site TheStreet.com makes its debut, fueling the dot-com explosion

1997 CBS Marketwatch is launched

1998 Dow Jones and CNBC announce they will collaborate on business news on overseas television. *The Industry Standard* is launched, covering the Internet economy

1999 Dow Jones Industrial Average tops 10,000 for the first time

2000 On August 25, a faked press release about Emulex, a technology equipment manufacturer, is picked up by *Bloomberg News* and a host of rival news services. The company's shares plummet until corrective news is released. The Associated Press teams up with Cnet.com to beef up its financial news offerings

fiercest, business journalism is the best it's ever been. But on average, it's behind where it was five or even ten years ago because the bottom has gotten a lot worse."

Remembering my own early naïveté, I am somewhat more optimistic. As a Wall Street novice, I once dashed off a quick funny feature about a thoroughbred stable newly listed on the American Stock Exchange without ever reading the financial statements detailing problems that soon put the stable in bankruptcy. In my own defense, company financial statements were harder to come by in those days and my editors were as trusting as I was. But I doubt that many young Wall Street reporters at a major regional daily could get away with a lapse like that today.

But if today's best and brightest are far more savvy about the modern machinery of business journalism, they seem far more naïve about its age-old temptations. Those covering the "new economy" for the "new media" seem especially mystified about why it's such a big deal if they invest directly in industries they cover, or accept cheap insider stock in some industry pal's IPO, or do consulting work on the side for technology companies.

Janelle Brown, writing thoughtfully in *Salon* in mid-1999, suggested that we need fresh ethical rules "flexible enough to anticipate new issues that will surely arise in this fast-paced industry, where the lives of journalists are increasingly entwined with the people whom they write about and companies that they cover. Or must all technology journalists simply accept that by joining the writer corps they are taking an oath to disavow the temptations of technology riches?"

Well, yes. At least those riches that raise questions about the independence and credibility of their reporting. A technology journalist can avoid unseemly conflicts simply by investing only in broad-based mutual funds. (Of course, those funds may own some technology stocks, silly. But somebody besides you will be deciding which stocks to own and for how long. And yes, those who work for Internet news organizations have a personal stake in the sector whether they own shares or not – but it's fully disclosed on your business card, for heaven's sake.)

These are not, after all, "new economy" issues. Selling out has been a temptation for journalists since the Republic was a pup. The congressional investigation of the 1929 stock market crash turned up evidence that market manipulators had paid New York newspaper reporters to tout stocks on demand. Ronald Steel noted, in his magnificent biography of Walter Lippmann, that the legendary pre-war journalist Arthur Krock, while at the *New York World Telegram*, actually moonlighted as a public relations adviser to the Wall Street firm of Dillon, Read. Maintaining an undisclosed personal stake in any arena that you are supposed to be covering independently and objectively — whether it's a political movement, a Broadway play, or an Internet stock — violates pre-Cambrian concepts of journalistic ethics. And in every generation, there have been sincere but misguided journalists who believed that, in their case, it was different.

One of them was, like me, an émigré from local journalism in Trenton. In 1981, he went to work at the Dow Jones News Service and in July 1982, he was hired by *The Wall Street Journal* to help write the paper's influential "Heard on the Street" column.

His name was R. Foster Winans.

Like today's young technology journalists, Winans found that his life soon became "entwined" with the rich, clever people he covered. He, too, was disgruntled over the stinginess of journalism paychecks. He, likewise, was certain he could invest on the side without "letting my investment alter my judgment at work in any way." Soon after he arrived at the *Journal*, Winans secretly bought 400 shares in a small, illiquid company, American Surgery Centers, and then wrote positively about the company in his column.

"I knew what I was doing was technically unethical for a journalist," he wrote in his memoir, *Trading Secrets: Seduction and Scandal at The Wall Street Journal*, published by St. Martin's Press in 1986. But he somehow reasoned that "the ethical question was purely one of appearances .... If no one ever found out, no one would perceive a potential conflict and, therefore, I would not have done anything unethical. It was slightly circular reasoning but it got me past the big hurdle."

Soon, Winans had agreed to tip a broker in advance about stocks that would be mentioned in his "Heard on the Street" columns, in exchange for a share of the profits. He made about $30,000 on the deal, more than he made in a year at the *Journal*. The outraged *Journal* reported on March 29, 1984, that regulators were investigating the scheme. In June 1985, Winans was convicted of various federal mail and wire fraud charges; he was later sentenced to eighteen months in jail. In 1987 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld his conviction.

Although Winans insisted to the end that he had not violated any laws, he knew what he had done to his fellow journalists. He had "confirmed the suspicions of many investors about stock market writers — that they take personal advantage of the information they gather. Realizing this hit me pretty hard."

Looking back after sixteen years, I still feel that the Winans affair put all the fearsome temptations of modern business journalism into razor-sharp relief for me. How could anyone mistake these for fuzzy-edged issues? But Matt Welch, a trenchant young media critic for the *Online Journalism Review*, told me recently that he is convinced that Winans's sins, if committed today, would not provoke one-tenth the media outrage expressed in 1984. When a Silicon Valley gossip columnist accepted cheap pre-IPO shares from a local technology mogul, he noted, many supposedly sensible professionals wondered aloud whether she had done anything wrong. "Journalists see all these people getting rich — including other journalists, back when online content was worth something," Welch says. "And a lot have really lost their bearings."

I can only hope that he is wrong. If he isn't, no matter how rich today's young journalists become in this great business-news bazaar, journalism itself will be poorer beyond measure.

But let's assume, under the influence of some persuasive Chardonnay, that most of us will attain the rocky promontory of intelligent skepticism and dig in there for the duration, regularly producing lucid, hard-headed business coverage. And let's further predict — yes, please, just another splash of that wine — that most of us will do so with our honor and reputations intact. We would still just be talking about what kind of people *we* are. And ultimately, this boom in business journalism is not really about us. Rather, it is about our relationship with those we're trying to reach — whether we call them readers, viewers, or (heaven help us!) "eyeballs."

My friend Jaye Scholl reminds me that most new business writers back in 1980 instinctively and perhaps wrong-headedly approached local business news from the perspective of the workers involved — after all, we were workers ourselves, with a healthy mistrust of what passed for management in the newspaper business. As the 1980s rocketed along, our "readers" became "consumers." As the 1990s unfolded, those "consumers" morphed into "investors." And today, some of us are speaking only to investors who also own computer modems.

A sad thing has happened along the way: as our intended audience has gotten narrower, so have we. Business news today rarely sounds the sonorous chords or heart-lifting themes of great journalism. Most of it simply buzzes and squeaks, a reedy clarinet against a rhythm section of cash registers and ticker tape. The men and women who scrambled to explain the economic turmoil of the 1970s — the gas lines and the shuttered factories and the apparent erosion of American competence — were not writing for consumers or investors. They were writing for citizens, for people who cared deeply about how this nation turned out. They assumed an audience whose concerns stretched far beyond the performance of their 401(k) and the leasing arrangements on their Jeep Grand Cherokee.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather be writing for those people again. I suspect that nothing we achieve in terms of competence and integrity as business journalists in the years to come will matter very much, unless we do. ■

Diana B. Henriques, a financial writer at The New York Times, *is the author of two business histories,* Fidelity's World: The Secret Life and Public Power of the Mutual Fund Giant *and* The White Sharks of Wall Street: Thomas Mellon Evans and the Original Corporate Raiders.

HARD NUMBERS/BUSINESS COVERAGE

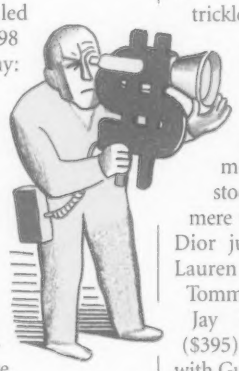
NEWSPAPER	STAFF SIZE EARLY 1980S	2000	DAILY PAGE COUNT EARLY 1980S	2000
Washington Post	18	81	2 pages behind sports	12-page daily section
LA Times	20-25	90	6-7 pages behind sports	average 14-18-page section
Dallas Morning News	8	54	1-3 pages	12-page section
San Francisco Chronicle	7	27	5 pages	12-16-page section
Tampa Tribune	2	14	3 pages	average 7-page section
Cleveland Plain Dealer	9	24-25	4-5 pages in another section	8-10-page section
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	7	19	3-4 pages	6-8-page section
Hartford Courant	3.5	17	3-5 pages in main news section	average 8-10-page section
Rocky Mountain News	6	14	14 pages	16-25 pages

OTHER MEDIA	1988	1999
Number of business magazines	358	694 (1998)
TV networks weekly minutes of business coverage	1,179	1,377
TV networks weekly minutes of NYSE/NASDAQ coverage	152	296
CNBC household audience growth	88,000 (1992)	339,000 (2000)

Sources include Dr. Samir Husni, Andrew Tyndall, and Nielsen Media Research.

"Wealth Porn" and Beyond

BY GARY ANDREW POOLE



Forbes magazine led off a May 2, 1998 story this way: "Do you know where you're going to be this summer? Nantucket, Napa, Jackson Hole, the south of France?" This might come across like cocktail chit-chat at Steve Forbes's country club, but in fact it is a water-cooler question for more and more people. Between 1995 and 1998, a million more Americans entered the ranks of the millionaires' club. To be considered rich in some circles now you have to be a pentamillionaire.

There is much to celebrate about the recent economic boom. Prosperity is better than the opposite, and the strong economy has not just greased the upper crust: the percentage of Americans living in poverty declined to 11.8 percent in 1999, the lowest poverty rate since 1969. "If you don't think the economy is doing well now," says Frank Wykoff, an economics professor at Pomona College, "you are a malcontent."

America is doing well, thanks, and the press is reporting the phenomenon. But do we over-celebrate the New Wealth, giving the reader the impression that he's the only one who isn't loaded, or that being rich is all that matters? Are we analyzing the ramifications of the new prosperity?

Among all of the stories on New Wealth, there is one strain that can only be described as "wealth porn": pieces that don't simply observe the positive cash flow into our Gucci billfolds/Kate Spade purses but make excessively broad generalizations and blindly venerate money. For an example, take *Time* magazine's October 18, 1999, piece about spas. "A massage now seems incomplete unless one is rubbed with freshly grated ginger or kneaded with heated stones (some of which are even placed between your toes) culled from southwestern rivers. Just trying to choose the right facial can raise your blood pressure . . . ."

Or take this Minneapolis *Star Tribune* story from July 3, 2000, about dressing kids in haute couture: "What began with a trickle of posh merchandise from such shops as Bon Point and Jacadi on Madison Avenue has become a deluge . . . . Now, new moms of means can stock up on DKNY cashmere cardigans ($60), Baby Dior jumpers ($165), Ralph Lauren velvet frocks ($110), Tommy Hilfiger khakis ($26), Jay Kos cashmere dresses ($395), and booties emblazoned with Gucci double-Gs ($145)."

It is entertaining to describe this stuff, but many stories do little beyond documenting sprees of consumption. The formula is this: someone is spending an outrageous amount of money for something — wow!

Some recent examples: a breathless page-one piece in New York's *Daily News* on June 26 about a new restaurant where, with wine and tip, dinner runs $500 ("The interior is so chichi women will have special stools just to rest their handbags."); a June *New York* magazine cover story on living in the city — "What It Really Costs To Live in New York" — which barely nodded to the possibility that some readers might not make six-figure salaries; a July 7, 2000 *Washington Post* piece about the hot new trend of chartering $250,000-a-week yachts and buying $26,500 Patek Philippe watches.

Expensive living is certainly a sign of the times, and gossip about the the rich is fun and probably not useless. But better articles tend to go beyond the numbers and the price tags, and explore the implications of new patterns of wealth and consumption. One such example: an October article in *San Francisco* magazine (disclosure: I'm a contributing writer to the magazine) about private schools, which instead of providing a standard list of the best schools, profiled the marketing director for Banana Republic, whose son had been rejected by a chic private school. The story followed



her as she tried to figure out why. But along the way it asked hard and interesting questions: Why do so many of Silicon Valley's new wealthy — raised middle class, public school educated, and avowed egalitarians — passionately believe that their children should wear the crest of a private school? Although the piece didn't go quite far enough, it raised some questions about the benefits of a private school education. Using the woman's narrative as a hook, the story offered a nuanced look into a difficult subject.

"The permutations of the new wealth have been under-reported," says Bret Israel, editor of the Southern California Living Section of the *Los Angeles Times*, and an editor who has tried to push fresher stories about the New Wealth into the paper. Israel says the *Times* has produced a few good ones, including a piece on how money has resulted in more contentious divorces.

While writing about the New Wealth has become more fashionable, Israel says he reads too many vapid articles about twentysomething millionaires. Stories about rich young people, in fact, have become routine. See *Fortune*'s September 18 cover story "Really Young, Really Rich," for example, or the September 18 cover in *Barron's*, "The New Rich." That one pictured a young woman swimming in a pool of $100 bills. "I think the under-thirty people have been overrated — way overrated," says Rich Karlgaard, publisher of *Forbes* magazine and founder of *Forbes ASAP*, a technology supplement to the magazine. "Many of the under-thirty crowd are stuck with worthless stock at DownTheTubes.com. The over-thirty group is probably underestimated, thanks to gains in real estate and stocks."

For all the missed opportunities, there have been some very good stories about the New Wealth. Patricia Leigh Brown, for example, wrote an article for *The New York Times* about the effect of big money on the values of the children who live in Silicon Valley. "A new sort of American childhood is being forged," she wrote on March 9, "in the land where each day brings the dawn of an estimated sixty new millionaires." Brown says she had "a lot of reaction" to the piece. She thinks readers have a strong desire to read more stories about the boom's impact on values, and about the soul-searching that, along with optimism, sometimes accompanies a flush stock portfolio. ■

Gary Andrew Poole is a free-lance writer who lives in San Francisco.

Blinded by the Boom: What's Missing in the Coverage of the New Economy?

BY MERRILL GOOZNER

The latest and largest generation of business reporters has come of age under economic conditions far different from those that shaped their immediate predecessors. The crises that forced business news onto the front page from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s — oil shocks, de-industrialization, insider trading, the 1987 crash, massive budget and trade deficits, the savings and loan fiasco, downsizing — are about as relevant now as yellowed clips in a file folder. (Though an oil shock is auditioning for a revival.)

It's the new economy, stupid. Fortunes are being made in high- and bio-tech. Productivity is soaring. The stock market is off the historical charts. Unemployment is low and minorities, women, and some inner cities are benefiting in ways that haven't been seen for generations.

The boom has its echo in financial reporting. Not only is there a great deal more of it, but reporters have gravitated to what is obviously the biggest story of the day: the stock market explosion and what pundits and political candidates are (incorrectly) calling this unprecedented era of economic growth. High technology, market coverage, and personal finance dominate the news holes and time slots reserved for business and economics news.

Some hyperbole has spilled over into the reportage. Coverage of the current prosperity can read like a sports page when the home team is on a roll: cheerleading can drown out the occasional story pointing out weaknesses in the squad or the challenges coming up in the schedule. Journalistic scorn is reserved for the players — or in this case stocks — that don't make their numbers.

But with the election behind us, it's time for the media to take a deeper look. It's not as if we haven't shined some light on the economy's darker corners. We have. But a series of interviews with top editors at news organizations and an informal search of Lexis-Nexis has confirmed my own recent experience as a business and economics journalist: the press has largely abandoned sustained coverage of pressing economic problems in favor of the occasional piece that temporarily highlights an issue.

This approach is unlikely to disturb many readers or move many politicians. The new administration will either tackle the nation's unfinished economic business or allow it to fester. If the media turn a brighter light on those who are missing out on the good times, it's more likely that the decisions made will be better informed.

WHO GETS HEARD

One way to gauge media coverage of economic problems is to listen to complaints about the press from both sides of the ideological divide, since both left and right tend to put economic issues near the top of their agendas. For years critics on the right flailed the media for an antagonistic attitude toward business, claiming that inaccurate and inflammatory stories about either the economy or corporate wrongdoing had led to excessive regulation. That, in turn, they said, hampered the U.S. business community's ability to compete. Some on the right still make such complaints.

But these days it's the other side — including the Green Party candidate Ralph Nader and his ideological allies — that is doing the most screaming. "Twenty years ago you had high-profile cases that gave the impression that the media had a vendetta against big business," says Richard Kaplar, vice president of the Media Institute, a conservative communications policy think tank, and a contributor to publications from the libertarian Cato Institute. "It's definitely different today, a completely different environment."

The liberal press watchdog, Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, agrees. Journalists are overly proud of the single



The protests at the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle a year ago got plenty of attention in the press. But the ideas behind the protests, and others like it, did not.

AP WIDE WORLD/ BETH A. KEISER

stories they do on issues like the problems of low-wage workers, says Seth Ackerman, who monitors economics coverage for FAIR. "But the bulk of the reporters like to gravitate to the big story, which is the new economy, the booming economy."

FAIR commissioned a study of journalistic attitudes at the nation's leading media outlets, including all the top papers and the television networks. Some results from the 1998 survey: 71 percent of the 141 capital correspondents and bureau chiefs polled by David Croteau of Virginia Commonwealth University supported fast-track trade negotiating authority for the president, a hot issue at the time. Concurrent newspaper polls of the general public showed just the opposite: 56 percent were opposed. It went down to defeat. On health insurance: journalists were roughly split on a government guarantee for people without it, 43 percent in favor and 35 percent opposed. The public was much more open to the idea. Citing a 1996 *New York Times* poll, FAIR said the public supported a federal guarantee on health insurance by more than two-to-one.

Has the rush to embrace the new economy and celebrate the new wealth caused well-paid reporters at elite media institutions to play down the woes and concerns of people who are not doing as well? Perhaps no issue dramatizes this possibility better than trade. Most mainstream economists agree that the domestic boom has been carried along in part by the expansion in trade and investment enabled by lower trade barriers. But those same economists would also agree that not everyone in America benefits from freer trade. There are winners and losers when barriers fall, and it can be argued that the press has ignored the losers' issues and concerns (as opposed to their demonstrations).

Certainly the nation's op-ed pundits and editorialists have expressed near-universal hostility toward them. During last year's World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, for instance, Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* set the tone by referring to the demonstrators as "a Noah's ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions, and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix." Similar demonstrations during the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings in Prague in late September were, to Friedman, held by "a rogues' gallery of Communists, anarchists, protectionist unions and over-fed yuppies out for their 1960s fix."

Has such hostility affected reporting? By the time of last spring's vote on whether to allow what is called Permanent Normal Trading Relations with the People's Republic of China, opponents could legitimately gripe that their arguments were not being given much of an airing in the press. The bill passed the House last May. Only the day after that did a story in *The Wall Street Journal*, by the veteran trade reporter Helene Cooper, reveal that business leaders were not primarily interested in selling more goods to China (the stance of President Clinton and the business media blitz in favor of the bill). It was instead seen as a bill to open China's door wider for U.S. investment — which could cost some Americans their jobs. Many union opponents had been saying that all along, but had trouble getting journalists to listen.

Again, several weeks after the vote, the *New York Times*'s trade reporter, Joseph Kahn, traveled to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to report the poignant story of 240 workers who were losing their jobs because their employer was moving to China. This was the kind of story that had appeared with great frequency during the debate leading up to passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement seven years earlier. But the angle now came as an afterthought (and was completely ignored when the bill passed the Senate in September). This can be taken as one measure of how prosperity has changed the journalistic environment.

THE WASHINGTON SHUFFLE

The increasingly sporadic coverage of government regulatory agencies also reflects the media's shifting priorities during this expansion. The consensus view among business leaders and mainstream economists is that reduced regulation of both markets and corporate behavior has been a major contributor to prosperity. The press has largely adopted this conventional wisdom. And that may be blinding reporters to stories they once covered with vigor. Consider, for example, coverage of the dangerously flawed Firestone tires. A National Highway Transportation Safety Administration probe was spurred in part by local television accounts last February by Anna Werner of KHOU-TV in Houston, who based her reports on suits filed by local trial lawyers. The reports triggered a slew of consumer complaints to the government, which eventually led to the probe.

Yet despite the local press accounts and a number of lawsuits, it took a half-year for the story to get national attention. "We assume in an Internet environment that every piece of information becomes universally shared very fast," says

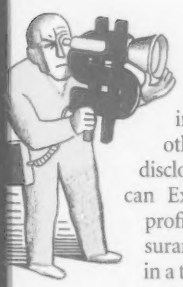
CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

In Washington, agencies that produce news of interest to investors are the ones most heavily covered

Carol Loomis

From time to time, under the title ROLE MODELS, CJR *will ask accomplished journalists to write about the people who inspired them. Here Floyd Norris, chief financial correspondent of* The New York Times, *discusses Carol Junge Loomis of* Fortune.

BY FLOYD NORRIS



My discovery that Carol J. Loomis was a phenomenal journalist came in 1983 — long after many others had figured it out. She disclosed in *Fortune* that American Express had manufactured profits at its Fireman's Fund insurance subsidiary by engaging in a transaction that had no economic reality, but that enabled the company to report decent results when the company's business was under great strain.

What was most impressive about the article was how she had pieced it together. The company had avoided disclosing it in its filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, and even the members of the audit committee of American Express's board of directors appeared to be in the dark. Loomis had gone through the reports that insurance companies must file with state insurance commissioners.

It was not the first triumph for Loomis, and it would not be the last. The previous year she had noticed that Aetna was using extraordinarily aggressive accounting to report profits. The information was in a footnote to the company's annual report, but the S.E.C. had not noticed it. After Loomis reported on it, the S.E.C. went after Aetna.

What struck me was that Loomis was not simply reporting what others had said, or amplifying a corporate press release. The information she relied upon was public, but to get at it someone had to read the documents carefully and understand them. That person had to have at least a basic understanding of accounting rules, and of the games that companies can play with them.

Over the years, Loomis has also been an excellent — if infrequent — commentator on the stock market. In 1978, she wrote a classic piece for *Fortune*, "The Irrational One-tier Stock Market," which argued that stocks were cheap, and growth stocks ridiculously so. That was not the conventional wisdom; investors in general were avoiding stocks.

Last year, while much of the much-expanded financial press was celebrating the market's strength, Loomis returned with an article explaining why stocks could not possibly live up to the then-exorbitant public expectations. This year, when Time Warner agreed to merge with AOL, she questioned whether AOL could be a good long-term investment at the prices then prevailing. (It is a credit to Time Warner, the publisher of *Fortune*, and to Loomis's stature, that the piece was published.)

Loomis's stock market writing is clearly influenced by her long association with Warren Buffett, the chairman of Berkshire Hathaway. It is a relationship that goes far beyond reporter-source: she edits Berkshire's annual reports — without being paid for the task — and plays bridge with Buffett over the Internet. That relationship bothers some journalists, especially when she writes about Buffett for *Fortune*. But she is always meticulous about disclosing the relationship.

Given her clear expertise in accounting, it is a bit surprising that Loomis has no formal education in the area. She graduated from the University of Missouri, with an undergraduate degree in journalism, in 1951, and worked on the Maytag Company's house organ, which enabled her to travel around writing articles about successful Maytag dealers.

She wanted to move to New York, so she applied to *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune* magazines for a job as a researcher. In those days, the magazines had researchers — almost always women — and writers — usually men — who worked together on stories. Asked at her *Time* interview which section she would most like to work on, she answered Business and was told that few applicants for researcher had ever said that before.

Fortune bit, however, and she started in January 1954. She became the assistant chief of research in 1958, a job that included overseeing preparation of the Fortune 500, then a relatively new thing.



SARA BARRETT

That job forced her to learn some accounting. "I just kind of picked up the accounting," she said in an interview. "I still am. You never get on top of accounting, or at least I don't."

In 1962 she was put to work on *Fortune*'s investing column and in 1968 — fourteen years after she joined the staff — she began writing what are called "middle-of-the-book" articles. She's still at it, although she now works for seven months a year and takes five months off. At seventy-one, she says she has no plans to retire.

When Loomis begins research for a corporate article, she reads the company's last five annual reports, cover to cover. "I just discovered this was a great way of learning about a company," she said. "You would see the company was no longer headed in the same direction as two years before." She found that interviews went better when executives discovered she was well-informed.

Getting a copy of a company's annual report is not hard. But it is amazing how underused they are by business journalists. It takes effort to make sense of many corporate disclosures, and it takes a lot of time to read the filings in detail, particularly if the reader does not know exactly what he or she is looking for. Loomis says she thinks that many journalists are simply scared of numbers.

Looking back, it is clear that reading Loomis helped show me the course I wanted to follow. She was, and remains, an inspiration. ■



"What does it do to American society, American communities, and American democracy when citizens are increasingly divided into two classes, one educated and one not, one advantaged and one not?

—Doyle McManus, *Los Angeles Times*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

Doyle McManus, Washington bureau chief for the *Los Angeles Times*. "This story was out there and nobody tried to put the larger pieces together."

Why? Perhaps rollovers by sports utility vehicles and unraveling tires were considered old stories. SUV rollovers (for other reasons) had received extensive coverage earlier in the decade. Or perhaps the business community's unrelenting attack on trial lawyers has made them suspect as a source. Or, maybe stories that investigate corporate wrongdoing do not have the same priority they did in the years before business was king.

The history of the last century suggests there will always be a role for government oversight of financial institutions, securities trading, the environment, and the workplace. It remains the press's job to monitor both the regulators and the regulated.

Editors bristle at the charge they are not performing the watchdog role when it comes to corporations. "Do corporations get a freer ride than they deserve? Sometimes," says Paul Steiger, managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*. "But in the past, they were sometimes unnecessarily pilloried." Doyle McManus argues that "institutional biases" of the press are much less significant "than critics on either the left or right would say."

Still, a 1999 survey by the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that major news organizations have substantially shifted their Washington coverage in recent years. There is less coverage of people and environment-oriented agencies, like the Labor Department and the Interior Department. Meanwhile, more reporters are watching the Treasury Department, the Federal Reserve Board, and agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Federal Trade Commission — all places that generate news primarily of interest to investors, corporate leaders, and their attorneys.

Clearly the latest shift in interest rates, the business implications of the big merger, or a major antitrust trial can affect millions of consumers. They deserve extensive coverage. But it's worth noting that it is relatively easy coverage. Well-paid public relations firms are usually available to articulate all sides of a dispute. Wall Street economists offer quick sound bites. Dozens of reporters can be found on these kinds of stories, often busily scribbling the same notes.

Meanwhile, there are only a handful of reporters trying to uncover stories at the Environmental Protection Agency or Occupational Safety and Health Administration, where sorting out the truth of competing claims can be a much more difficult task. Big firms have become adept at deploying small armies of scientists and experts to rebut charges by the public interest groups or trial lawyers seeking to represent aggrieved citizens and communities. Too many news organizations have simply thrown up their hands at the welter of charges and counter-charges and sharply cut back on the press's traditional watchdog role.

THE ELEPHANT UNSEEN

And then there's the elephant in the new economy's living room: the growing inequality in both income and wealth.

We're living through a sort of Gilded Age that hasn't yet been given its label. But when the age does go down in history, inequality of wealth and income will be a major hallmark.

Leaders of the nation's opinion-molding news outlets scoff at the notion that the media have ignored inequality. "We've covered that forever and ever," says Steiger. To its credit, despite its natural audience, the *Journal* does indeed pay attention to the downside of the economy. And its annual survey of c.e.o. pay — and similar surveys at dozens of the nation's leading newspapers and magazines — early-on highlighted the expanding ratio of executive compensation to pay in the ranks. Revealing studies about wealth and income-distribution trends published by left-leaning think-tanks like the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Budget Policy and Priorities are routinely reported in the press and on television.

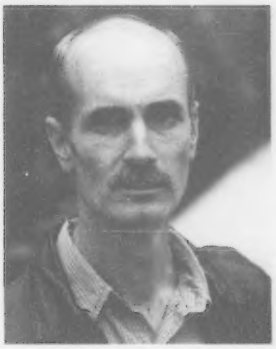
One-shot features about families struggling in the shadow of plenty have also become a staple. Indeed, editors at *The New York Times*, which sets the tone for journalists across the country, met in the run-up to the presidential election to discuss coverage of how the new wealth was affecting society. They rejected the idea of running a series similar to one on downsizing that ran during primary season in 1996. "The outcome was that each desk would handle the issues individually," says Claudia Payne, a senior editor for investigative news at the *Times*. "There would be an attempt to take snapshots without the rubric."

But snapshots can be overwhelmed by routine coverage that suggests that because more people own stocks, the largess of the new economy is being shared more equitably. That assumption is dead wrong. In 1998, the top 20 percent of families pulled in 47.3 percent or nearly half of national income (earnings, not investment) — up from 44.6 percent in 1989 and 41.4 percent a decade before that. The share of national income going to every other group in society fell consistently across those two decades.

The distribution of wealth (stocks, bonds, real estate, and the like) also grew more unequal over the period, although that was reversed slightly in the late 1990s because of the stock market boom. Still, the top fifth of households' share of national wealth stood at 83.4 percent in 1998, compared to 81.3 percent in 1983. Every group in the bottom 80 percent of the population fell over the period, largely because of rising household debt. The bottom line is that many Americans are falling behind, not just compared to the wealthy, but compared to where they were a few decades ago.

It is difficult to illustrate growing inequality, and "it's difficult to pound the table and say injustice is being done because average income is rising," says Jill Dutt, business editor of *The Washington*

Q&A: JAMES LARDNER OF INEQUALITY.ORG



James Lardner is the director and founder of Inequality.org, *a Web site that focuses on America's economic divide. The site launched two years ago — starting with a simple bar graph of the* Titanic's *survival rates by first class, second class, third class, and steerage. Lardner has since collected an impressive cadre of contributors and advisers, and the site now publishes articles on topics like income, health, and the digital divide; offers resources and expert sources for journalists; and provides statistics about wealth and income (i.e.: "34 percent of the homeless people in Silicon Valley hold full-time jobs"). A former* New Yorker *staff writer, Lardner now works for* U.S. News & World Report. *A former cop, he is co-author (with Tom Reppetto) of* NYPD: The Inside Story of New York's Legendary Police Department, *published in July. He is the grandson of the sportswriter and humorist Ring Lardner and son of Ring Lardner, Jr., the screenwriter and member of the "Hollywood Ten" who was blacklisted for refusing to name names for Senator Joe McCarthy's communist witch hunt. He was interviewed by* CJR*'s assistant editor, Lauren Janis.*

■ *Did the idea to start* Inequality.org *grow out of what you saw in society? Or out of the fact that the media were not paying attention to it?*

It was certainly that the media were not paying attention. I thought of it as a Web site for journalists principally, to begin with. I assumed that other journalists would be interested in this subject and would like to have a place where they could go to get data and analysis. Economic inequality is a difficult subject to write about in the present mood where we celebrate entrepreneurs and wealth. So I wanted not only to provide a resource, but also some encouragement. And to give them ideas of what might be good stories, because it seemed to me there was a lot of interesting research and thinking that wasn't getting in the mainstream press.

■ *And why isn't it getting into the mainstream press?*

Now some of it is. But I think that the simple fact that we're living through this economic boom time, or what everyone regards that way, makes people not terribly interested in anything contrary. Besides that, I think we still live very much under the shadow of communism and the received lessons of that historical idea. For a lot of people that shadow has kind of closed the argument on the question of trying to mitigate inequality. It's a topic that just became too highly charged — you couldn't say anything about it without somehow getting caught up, willingly or unwillingly, in the whole cold war debate. Only now, years since the end of the cold war, is it even beginning to be possible to look at this question dispassionately.

■ *If* Inequality.org *is successful in its mission, what would you like to see?*

I'd like to see it become okay to talk about inequality of income and wealth as a problem and not simply in terms of social justice. People are bumping up against the inequality problem in a whole bunch of fields right now — in education, health care, campaign-finance reform, the whole digital divide, and the discussion about technology itself. In all these areas, people are trying to micro-mitigate, trying to carve out some little oasis of relative equality in the middle of extreme inequality, and they're discovering that it's very hard. There's not much acknowledgement that in one issue after the other, you're seeing symptoms of extreme, pervasive inequality of income and wealth. There's a broad problem. But it's not kosher to talk about that broad problem.

■ *What are journalists doing wrong?*

One thing is that the focus tends to be too much on the simple question of poverty as it's officially defined. A lot of people have questioned the official definition. But aside from that, there is definitely an economic orthodoxy that most of the reporters who write about business or economics conform to. They just laugh at all those people who question globalization and free-floating capital. We're sort of trained just to sneer at anyone who questions that. Starting with the Reagan years, we all got sold to one degree or another, regardless of our party affiliations, on the idea that there's nothing that can be done about the distribution of wealth and income without going down the road of heavy-handed state planning, so-called big government. People are only just beginning to free themselves up from that way of thinking.

■ *Is your hope that* Inequality.org *will help change the way media look at poverty and wealth?*

It's only going to be a really useful thing if it's part of a larger change that I like to imagine is happening and will happen even more. I want it to be part of a process of moving the subject onto the front burner, putting it on the map.

Post. "There is also this sense with the new economy that we have true rags-to-riches stories. Many more people know somebody who got into the entrepreneurial boom and succeeded."

Yet the result seems to be a virtual media blackout on the most important question related to the new economy: What impact is the growing disparity in income and wealth having on our democracy, and on our notion of who we are as a people? This issue troubled the Founding Fathers, and has come to the fore at other times of rapid economic change. "The day will come when our Republic will be an impossibility," warned President James Madison in a interview with the *New York Post.* "It will be an impossibility because wealth will be concentrated in the hands of a few."

McManus of the *Los Angeles Times* is one journalist who sees the problem: "What does it do to American society, American communities, and American democracy when citizens are increasingly divided into two classes, one educated and one not, one advantaged and one not?

"What story needs to be done now?" he asks. "It's hard to do, but it's the story that looks at the 'so-what' of income inequality." ■

Merrill Goozner recently left the Chicago Tribune *to teach business and economics journalism at New York University.*

SARA BARRETT

Yes, the Rich Get Richer, But There's More to the Story

BY ROBERT H. FRANK



At the turn of the twentieth century, when the state of Iowa alone had more than 1,200 opera houses, thousands of tenors earned adequate, if modest, livings performing before live audiences. Now that most music we listen to is pre-recorded, however, the world's best tenor can be everywhere at once. And since it costs no more to stamp out compact discs from Luciano Pavarotti's master recording than from a less renowned tenor's, most of us now listen to Pavarotti. Millions of us are each willing to pay a little extra to hear him rather than other singers who are only marginally less able or well known. And this helps explain why Pavarotti earns millions of dollars a year, even as other tenors nearly as talented struggle to get by.

Although the details differ case by case, the underlying story is much the same in many other industries. For example, the tax-advice industry, once the almost exclusive domain of the small-scale local practitioner, is increasingly served by the developers of TurboTax and a handful of other software packages. Once the market decides which package it likes best, the authors of that package can easily churn out as many copies as buyers want. Other packages become essentially redundant.

Similar technologies have transformed the economic structure of the media. For major world and national news stories, more and more people rely on a shrinking cadre of well-paid reporters from elite institutions. Networks and many dailies have cut back on foreign bureaus and Washington coverage, leaving such coverage to the top outlets. Papers like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* can now be printed daily in every region of the country.

The same technologies that have allowed tenors, tax advisers, and news organizations to extend their reach have had important implications for the current boom. In purely economic terms the most salient feature of this boom is neither its magnitude nor its duration, although both are remarkable. Rather, it is the extent to which the resulting gains have accrued to families atop the economic pyramid. For example, families in the top 5 percent of the income distribution saw their earnings grow by 65 percent between 1973 and 1999, a period during which the incomes of families in the middle fifth grew by only 11 percent. Income gains at the very top have been even more pronounced. C.e.o.s of large American companies, for instance, now earn more than 450 times as much as the average worker, up from forty-two times as much in 1980. Recent changes in stock valuations, meanwhile, have produced a similar concentration of wealth at the top. Booms do not always have this effect. During the one that ran from 1945 until the early 1970s, incomes grew at almost 2.5 percent a year for high-, middle-, and low-income families alike.

The increased concentrations of income and wealth are the driving force behind the current luxury spending boom. The nation's wealthiest families have been doing what people up and down the income ladder have always done when their bank accounts swell. They've been spending more. And since they already owned the things most people think of as necessities, they've been buying luxuries. But whereas we saw little media coverage of luxury spending during the three decades from 1945 to 1975, stories like the ones Gary Poole, on page 22, calls "wealth porn" are now pervasive. Why this change?

Part of the explanation is a simple contrast effect. People in the 99th percentile always used to have somewhat bigger houses and better cars than the rest of us. But that fact alone is not particularly interesting, and hence not a ripe topic for media commentary. Today, because the income and wealth gaps are so much larger than in the past, the wealthy are building 20,000 square foot houses with six-car garages, and filling them not with $50,000 BMWs but $200,000 Ferraris and Lambourghinis. These purchases are newsworthy for the same reason a group of eight-foot-tall fourth-graders would be newsworthy — because they stand out so vividly in the frame of reference defined by everyday experience. Things that stand out in this way have always commanded attention.



Teenagers party at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City

Is it a problem that *Time* magazine tells us that a "massage now seems incomplete unless one is rubbed with freshly grated ginger or kneaded with heated stones (some of which are even placed between your toes) culled from Southwestern rivers?" Social critics worry that such stories foster the nation's preoccupation with "getting and spending." This may indeed be a problem, yet one can hardly expect to solve it by castigating the media. The phenomenon is striking, and people are naturally interested in it. Media that didn't cover it would soon lose their audiences to rivals that did.

(What is more, it is hardly clear that coverage of wealth porn is socially detrimental, even from the perspective of social critics who find it so distasteful. Most of

SCOTT GOLDSMITH

The media miss links between new wealth and middle-class distress

these critics would prefer to see less spent on yachts and mansions and more spent on basic public services. Can they doubt that media coverage of over-the-top luxury spending has helped shape voter attitudes on tax cuts for wealthy families?)

Another salient aspect of the media's coverage of the current boom has been the extent to which even mainstream media have begun showering us with arcane financial data. A decade ago, reporters might have told us that interest rates had risen a quarter of a point, or that the unemployment rate had dropped a tenth of a point, or that the monthly trade deficit had fallen by $2 billion. But now, even on general news segments, we are bombarded with details once considered too technical even for seasoned financial industry professionals, from data on manufacturing inventories to capacity utilization to building permits and the like.

What's troubling is that all the churning required to produce these reports and all the millions of hours spent watching them are almost surely a waste of time and effort. Economists disagree about many things, but one belief we share is that investors can almost never make financial headway by trading on the basis of numbers they hear about through the media. By the time such news reaches us, others will have long since acted upon it.

But here, too, consider the potential cost to media outlets that failed to cover these numbers. Throughout much of the current boom, stock prices have risen more rapidly than during almost any other period in market history. Viewers were hungry for the latest numbers, and any outlet that failed to provide them would have been sure to lose market share. If there is a silver lining to the recent downturn in tech share prices, it is that this flood of information may finally recede. As long as the market was rising, people couldn't resist watching the stream of share prices scrolling beneath MSNBC's talking heads. But now that the news has become mostly unfavorable, many viewers are bound to find the same information far less appetizing.

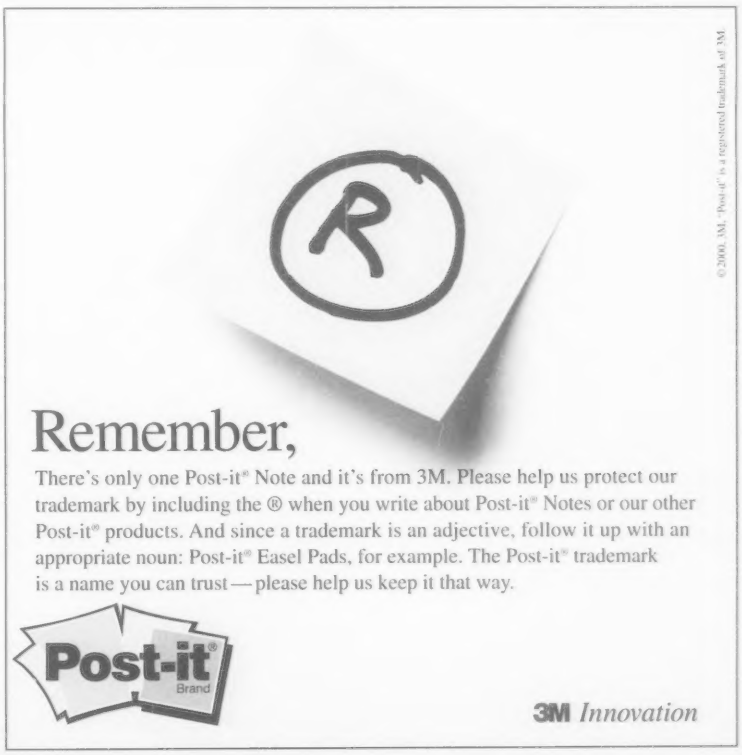
One of the genuinely troubling aspects of the current luxury boom — and one of its largely untold stories — is that additional spending by the wealthy has led many middle- and low-income families to spend beyond their means. Although the incomes of these families have stagnated in real terms during recent decades, for example, the average new home built in the U.S. is now more than 50 percent larger than in 1970. To meet their larger mortgage payments, middle-income families have been saving less, borrowing more, working longer hours, commuting longer distances, going without health insurance, and filing for bankruptcy at record rates.

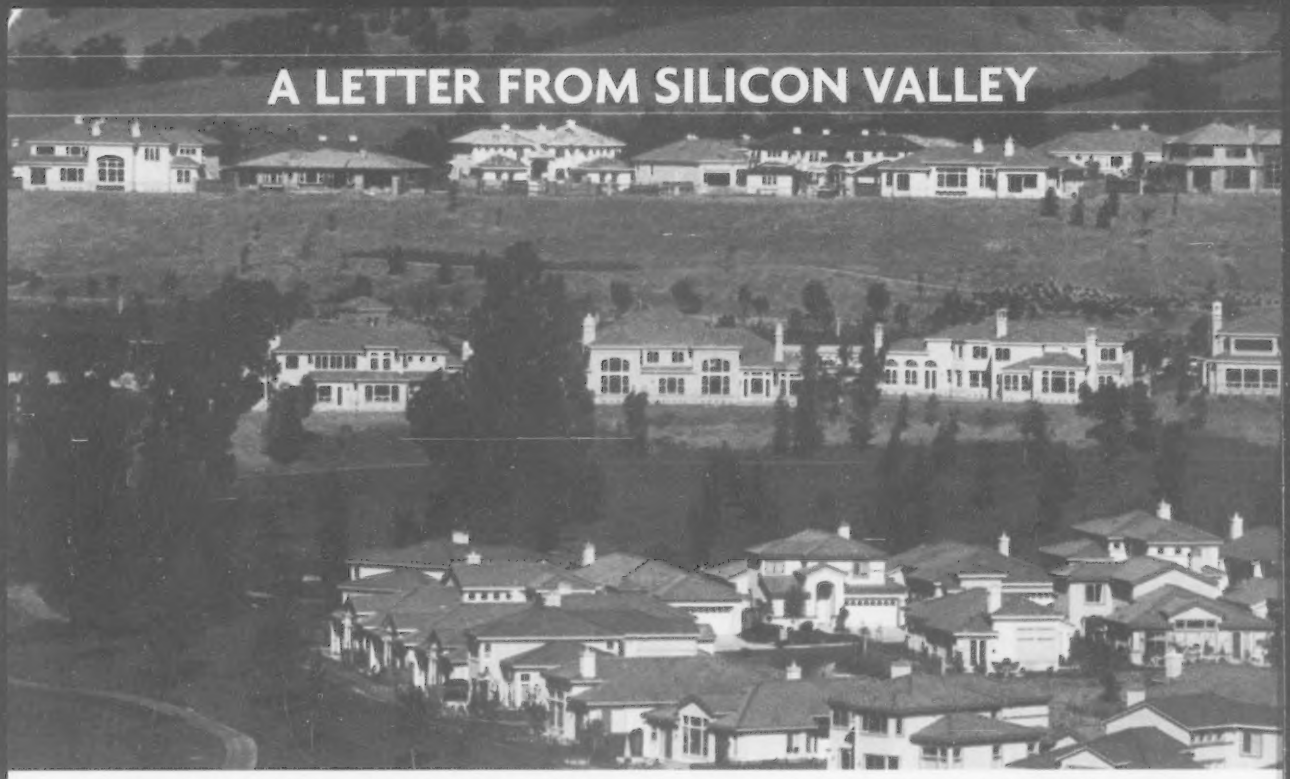
The media have almost totally ignored the causal connections between the wealth boom and rising distress among the middle class. (Some notable exceptions: Louis Uchitelle and Dirk Johnson of *The New York Times* have described this link in several well-crafted pieces; James Lardner wrote an incisive cover story about it for *U.S. News & World Report*; and the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an excellent two-part series on this issue.) The pieces that do report on middle-class financial distress often quote spokesmen for the personal responsibility movement who condemn financially strapped middle-class families for their lack of discipline. These critics insist that if middle-income families can't afford to keep up with the consumption standard set by others, they should simply spend less and stop complaining.

But this criticism overlooks the fact that failure to spend on a par with others often entails costs that few families could comfortably tolerate. Living in a house priced well below average, for example, can mean living in a dangerous neighborhood, or having to send one's children to a substandard school. If the roads are filled with 6,000-pound sport utility vehicles, you may put your family at risk by buying a Honda Civic. And it may not be in your interest to show up for a job interview in a suit that costs half as much as the ones your rivals are wearing.

The technologies that have been steering the lion's share of income and wealth gains to those atop the economic pyramid are in their infancy. The gap between top earners and everyone else will continue to grow, as will the resulting pressures on middle-income families. This is not an inherently alluring story for journalists, but its importance will grow as the stakes in the battle for market share continue to mount. If it is not yet, as Merrill Goozner suggests on page 23, the single most important economic issue confronting the nation, it soon will be. ■

Robert H. Frank (rhf3@cornell.edu) is the Goldwin Smith Professor of Economics at Cornell University and the author of Luxury Fever.





In northern California, the economic center of gravity is shifting south, from San Francisco to once-sleepy San Jose, site of these mansions.

EPICENTER

At Ground Zero of the Digital Revolution, Journalism Is Taking a Wild Ride

BY MICHAEL S. MALONE

It used to be so peaceful here. Herb Caen was in his Baghdad and all was right with the Bay Area.

Every weekday morning in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Herb would sling the gossip and redefine the local gestalt. And every Sunday he would draft a nostalgia piece to keep us happily looking backwards to the days when ladies wore white gloves on Market Street and San Jose didn't even know it was an object of ridicule.

San Francisco owned it all: the important newspapers, the big radio stations, the network TV affiliates. The City was smug, Oakland seethed, and the South Bay wished it could be cool.

Then all hell broke loose. Silicon Valley grew rich and famous, the Internet boomed, Oakland elected Jerry Brown, and Herb is drinking again with Trader Vic somewhere in Babylon by the Styx. In the process, Bay Area journalism, for a century sleepy, bucolic, and parochial, went mad.

From my childhood well into adulthood, nearly all of it spent in the archetypal 'burb of Sunnyvale, my sources for news were utterly predictable. In the morning I read the *Chronicle*, in the afternoon the *San Jose Mercury News*. The *Chronicle* had all the best writers, especially the columnists, but you never believed a word of its news coverage. The *Mercury News*, by comparison, was precise, unbiased, except in its coverage of downtown politics, and utterly boring. All television news came from the three network affiliates, all based in San Francisco — meaning I was more likely to hear about traffic on the Bay Bridge than a mass murder down the street. The sole South Bay news station, KNTV, had a signal so weak that it was forced to hand out signal boosters in the form of softball-sized hunks of metal that viewers had to bolt to their aerials. Radio was a San Francisco monopoly as well.

AP WIDE WORLD: SCOTT ANGER

And as for magazines, unless you were very, very interested in flame ionization gas chromatographs, and other hot local trade magazine topics, you stuck to *Time* and *Newsweek*. It remained that way for nearly a quarter century.

Then, in the early eighties, tiny cracks began to appear in this edifice. Epicene old Joe Ridder retired as publisher of the *Mercury News*, to be replaced by his preppy, upbeat jogger nephew, Tony. The *Mercury News* suddenly became younger, less parochial, and tougher on the downtown establishment. It was still boring, but at least it was now the paper of record for the Bay Area. It even landed two Pulitzers, one for helping pull down Ferdinand Marcos, with a 1985 series documenting how he transferred wealth abroad, the other for covering the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake that devastated the Bay area. It also launched a Monday business section that became the de facto newsletter of the Valley.

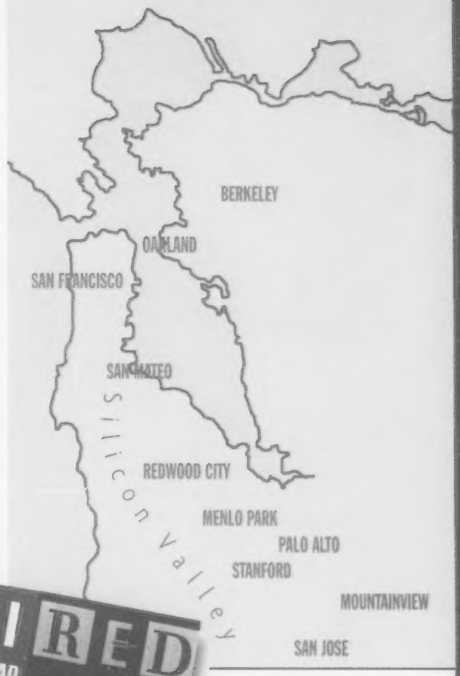
The *Mercury News* was now a very good paper, and it might have been great with a little more imagination and money — i.e., had its growing Silicon Valley ad revenues not been used to bolster the rest of the Knight Ridder chain. Meanwhile, in the City (as San Francisco continued to call itself without a trace of irony), the *Chronicle*'s best writers were beginning to die off one by one.

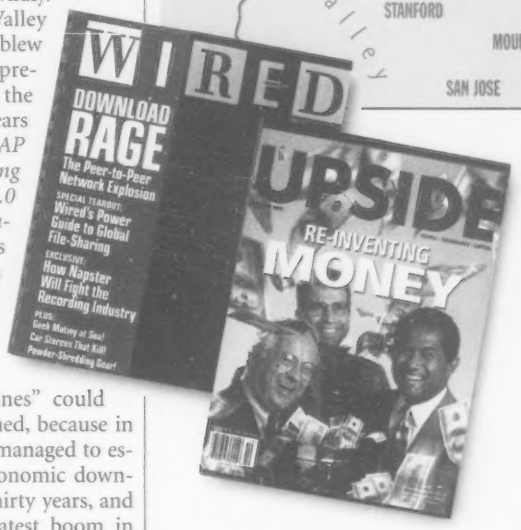
Local television remained unchanged. KNTV made a small nod to the massive industrial revolution taking place outside its windows by hiring a tech reporter. But on the day in 1989 that Intel introduced the 486 processor, the most important new product on the planet, the reporter was sent to cover a cat in a tree. Approached with an outside proposal for the nation's first half-hour tech news show, KNTV chose instead to run *Three's Company* reruns. Up North, KGO (ABC), KRON (NBC), and KPIX (CBS) treated Silicon Valley events with the kind of slack-jawed awe one might expect from a UFO landing. As for the *Chronicle*, its Valley coverage was often inferior to that being filed by the new tech beat reporters from *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. The stage was now set.

The break-up of the Old Order came in the 1990s, and the catalytic event was the birth of two new magazines: *Upside* (1989) and *Wired* (1992). They were the most unlikely creations of such a retro community. But like *Rolling Stone* two decades earlier, they were the product of a new generation of writers and a newly prosperous subculture desperate to tell its story.

Wired, with its migraine-inducing graphics and weird mix of the sacred (techno-utopianism) and the profane (the Burning Man Festival), quickly perfected the illuminati vs. ignorant masses style that made it a necessary read — even if you didn't know what it was talking about. *Upside*, by comparison, celebrated, ridiculed, and in every way treated Silicon Valley as Hollywood, as if it were the center of the universe (which it was about to be).

Neither magazine would have succeeded at any other time in Valley history, yet both now did, wildly. And, with typical Valley volatility, they quickly blew up — scattering entrepreneurial talent all over the Bay Area. The next few years saw the rise of *Forbes ASAP* (1992); *Red Herring* (1993); *Business 2.0* (1998), and *Industry Standard* (1998); as well as non-native imitators such as *Fast Company* (1995) and, most recently (June 2000), *Fortune*'s *eCompany Now*.





These new "eMagazines" could not have been better timed, because in the 1990s Silicon Valley managed to escape the quadrennial economic downturn it had known for thirty years, and instead enjoyed the greatest boom in American economic history. It pulled the stock markets and most of the rest of the world up with it. Better yet, this sustained boom was driven by the arrival of the Internet, which in turn spawned thousands of local eCommerce companies. These dot-coms may have employed little more than six kids with nose rings, but they also were backed by millions in venture capital — and later by billion-dollar IPOs — with a charter to build brand awareness at any cost. And the first place these little motley crews looked to place advertisements to build that awareness was to the new eMagazines they all read.

Thus, where a decade before the Bay Area could barely sustain *MacWorld* and the local PBS magazine, suddenly these new magazines were overrun with money and ads. It didn't matter that most of their reporting was formulaic and predictable; by the end of the decade some of their issues were among the thickest ever published. In June, a 408-page hernia-inducing issue of *Business 2.0* landed with a crash on my desk, and before I had time to remark that it was thicker than the Palo Alto phone book, a 608-page copy of *Red Herring* thudded atop it.

Critics caviled that people didn't actually read these publications, but, as with bridal magazines, merely thumbed through the ads. Others complained that the eMagazines, unlike their historical predecessors such as *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*, had done nothing innovative or interesting with their great opportunity — and that most would never make a dime in profits. But the simple fact was that



they had succeeded in one of the greatest launches the publishing world had ever seen — and they had done so largely with inexperienced editors and an army of post-adolescent reporters.

It is that army of reporters that may prove the most important new phenomenon in Bay Area journalism. Young reporters fresh out of college dreamed not of going to New York or Washington, but to San Francisco to cover the birth of the Internet Age. The eMagazines, watching their news holes double in size every month, snapped up every one who stepped off the bus. And if they didn't get them, the content-oriented Web sites, like *Quokka.com* and *Salon.com* (started by ex-*Examiner* writers and editors), did.

Predictably, many of these youngsters were energetic but not very good. They desperately needed adult supervision, so the eMags and Web journals began raiding the area's traditional media outlets. The result was a feeding frenzy that ran through much of last year and into this spring. Headhunters dangled high salaries, titles, and stock options, and called every tech and business writer in the Bay Area at least twice a week.

You didn't have to be an economist to predict what would happen when supply and demand curves went this wacky: experienced reporters played musical chairs for the highest offer, twenty-five-year-old "veterans" demanded six-figure salaries and senior editor titles, and old grizzled newsroom types in black outfits sat on Aeron chairs in South of Market lofts. Both the *Mercury News* and *Chronicle* business sections resembled revolving doors.

And that was just the start. About this time, traditional media suddenly discovered Silicon Valley as well. Everyone from CNN to *Le Monde* began sending reporters to the Valley to find the Big Story. But the biggest effort was made by the three dominant business magazines, which saw not only a sexy business story, but also the biggest advertiser opportunity around. *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Business Week* didn't just cover tech. Sometimes they seemed to turn their entire publications over to it. It wasn't long before the newsmagazines followed suit.

At its best, this new level of coverage was a magnificent reconciliation between traditional journalism and the brave new tech world. At its worst, it was like having your newly divorced uncle start wearing his cap backwards. At its nadir, which occurred just this past August, *Time*'s managing editor, Walter Isaacson, visited Burning Man, where he watched the naked revelers, and pronounced it "unbelievably cool."

At full frenzy, which history may record as the early spring of 2000, it almost seemed that there were more people covering Silicon Valley than actually working in it. On any given day there may have been two thousand ambitious young reporters shaking the bushes of the Valley, all covering the same damn story about programmable logic arrays.

Ironically, Valley corporate flacks — the biggest beneficiaries of this generally shallow and nonjudgmental attention — were among the first to complain. For decades they prayed the world would notice — and now they'd gotten their wish in the form of a tsunami ("Neil Cavuto on line one, *The Washington Post* on line two, *Grok* magazine on line three . . .") Increasingly, their job became making sure the c.e.o. didn't spend every waking hour talking to reporters.

Obviously it couldn't last forever. And when a stock market crash finally came in the late spring, no one but the true-believing Jimmy Olsens were surprised. What did surprise the old-timers was that even as the dot.coms imploded, yet another boom, this time among the big chipmakers (Intel) and their suppliers (Applied Materials), as well as the giant software companies (Oracle), actually minimized the blow.

And a good thing, too, because the eMags were all bursting with staffers, and some, such as *Red Herring* and *Business 2.0*, were racing toward a biweekly cycle. Had there been a traditional, across-the-board, Valley downturn, the very survival of some of these magazines might be at stake. Instead, the local tech journalism community is holding its collective breath, as its universe of reportable content contracts. An estimated one thousand dot.coms may be dead or merged into oblivion

In June, a 408-page issue of *Business 2.0* landed with a crash on my desk, followed by a 608-page copy of *Red Herring*

by the end of the year. What will that do to magazine advertising revenues? Are there enough blue-chip tech companies to fill in the breach with big advertising supplements? Or will the eMagazines have to look elsewhere? Having established themselves as the house experts of eCommerce, how will they morph themselves to report the new reality?

Already, *Red Herring* is whispering about becoming the "new *Vanity Fair*" — but that's a long journey from where it and its counterparts currently sit, exposed for what they really are: very, very lucky trade magazines. The hard times are yet to come. The last of the eCommerce shakeout will likely occur this Christmas.

And what of the Bay Area's newspapers? Remarkably, their story is almost as wild as those of the eMagazines. The *Mercury News* grew so fat off the Valley that even Knight Ridder couldn't ignore the truth. Tony Ridder had become Knight Ridder c.e.o. and had moved from San Jose to Miami by now, leaving Jay Harris as publisher of the *Mercury News*. Then, in September 1998, Tony Ridder picked up the whole corporation and went home; he moved Knight Ridder headquarters to an office building at ground zero in San Jose. The better to put his bread where it was being buttered.

The *Mercury News*, meanwhile, after two decades of treating the Valley like an unpleasant, but very rich, aunt, suddenly decided to embrace it — to the point of naming most of its sections ("Silicon Valley Life") and its Sunday roto ("SV") after the region in a shameless bid for loyalty. Unfortunately, it trained its staffers to cover high tech just in time for the eCommerce boom — and thus the *Mercury News* became the chief headhunting target for every new tech magazine and content site in America. Even as it pronounced itself the hometown paper of Silicon Valley, the *Mercury News* was being bled of nearly everyone who knew how to cover the place.

Up north it got even weirder. Hearst made a bid to buy the *Chronicle* and put the *San Francisco Examiner*, which was doing the standard dying fall of all afternoon papers, up for sale. No takers for months. Then, suddenly Hearst announced it was giving the *Examiner* to a local publisher, the Fang family, a fate many local reporters thought was worse than corporate death. The Fangs own a controversial thrice-weekly called *San Francisco Independent*. Not only that, but Hearst agreed to toss in up to $66 million in subsidies on the deal.

The local alternatives screamed foul, claiming that Hearst had been pressured into selling to the Fangs by the latter's allies in city hall. A federal judge looked at the matter and concluded that Hearst was just trying to keep antitrust regulators off its back. That didn't keep him from describing the whole affair as "malodorous." But the *Chronicle* sale took place on July 28.



Tony Ridder, chairman and c.e.o., Knight Ridder Inc.

The word "malodorous," deserved or not, could also have been used to describe the Fangs' reputation for being both too close to advertisers and too willing to publicly eviscerate any local figure they didn't like. On top of that, the Fangs quickly hired Warren Hinkle as the *Examiner*'s gray eminence. Hinkle is a local legend, both for being something of a newspaper genius, and for being an outrageous character in a city that's never been short of such eccentrics.

Hearst offered jobs at the *Chronicle* to the *Examiner* staff. Many reporters couldn't dive out of the *Examiner* fast enough.

Senior management never got any job promise, however. And so, a top editor beauty contest between the *Chronicle*'s Jerry Roberts and Matt Wilson and the *Examiner*'s Phil Bronstein began. Meanwhile, down in the newsroom, redundancy is causing some people to look for a way to stab their counterparts in the back. In one already legendary case, a *Chronicle* staffer, when asked to describe the job she wanted, not only suggested a roving reporter position that would enable her to travel the world, but also tried to stick her *Examiner* counterpart with a rotten desk beat. She then proceeded to list, in an e-mail to the editor that became public, all the people she should never have to work with.

Inside the now-crowded *Chronicle*, the scene is one of nervous expectation. The paper would appear to have more talent and more financial capital, and thus be ready to break out in a sleek and more powerful new form. Certainly, the *Chron*'s strategists are talking a good game — turning the Sunday magazine into a *New York Times Magazine* lookalike, for example — but the view from the trenches is more foggy. There will be a lot of two-person games of musical chairs in the weeks ahead, and a lot of unhappy people are going to be left standing. What that will do to the quality of the newspaper is anyone's guess.

The *Mercury News*, meanwhile, always sympathetic to its condescending neighbor to the north, quickly opened a new bureau in San Francisco and began



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to all but give away newspapers there. The rumor was that the *Mercury News* was less interested in new readers and more in extending its readership range to jack up ad rates for its Silicon Valley customers. The *Mercury News*, of course, presented the move as a way to offer its readers more complete regional coverage.

Finally, just to make sure that the craziness stretched from one end of the Bay Area to the other, the *Marin* (County) *Independent Journal*, a fine regional paper, was bought by the cost-slashing Singleton Group (ANG Newspapers), already notorious for running the *Oakland Tribune* like an Indonesian Nike factory.

Almost lost in the chaos was the fact that readership of all the papers continued to fall, making them look like snail darters fighting over the last cup of pond water. Silicon Valleyites (and that now included professionals in San Francisco and Oakland) faced with a barrage of news coming across their TVs, radios, and computer screens, were turning less and less to newsprint. And Valley workers, caught in the longest commutes in America, simply didn't have time to read. Thus the *Mercury-News* was selling about 290,000 copies in a community of one and a half million of the best-educated people on the planet.

And, speaking of post-literacy, what of local TV? Remember little KNTV in San Jose? Well, it found religion too, announced it had been bought by Oprah's Granite Broadcasting, dropping its ABC affiliation and switching to wall-to-wall prime time technology news — apparently ignoring the fact that even engineers can hear only so much about application specific integrated circuits and gate arrays. But before KNTV managed to embark on that dubious course, an amazing thing happened: the powerful San Francisco station, KRON, feuded with NBC and lost its NBC affiliation. KNTV quickly snapped it up. And though the transfer won't be fully consummated until 2002, it is already obvious that in media, as in business, the center of gravity in the Bay Area has shifted south. Even the freeway traffic has reversed direction. Frisco still has the views, but San Jose has the news.

What next? A shakeout, as the *Chronicle* excises its duplicates, the eMagazines deflate, and the Valley finally slows into a well-earned recession.

That's the bad news — but it's also good news. All of those young eMagazine reporters have had an unmatched training camp the last couple of years. Set free, they are likely to stay on the turf they know. Same with those veteran reporters at the *Examiner* and *Chronicle*. Together, they represent a potent mix; perhaps enough to spark a revolution equivalent to the one that's taken place here in electronics. Apply a little venture capital and a lot of entrepreneurial ambition, and maybe those folks will uncork the next Media Renaissance we've all been awaiting since we first saw the Web. We'll know in about two years, when broadband hits the home.

And it used to be so peaceful here. ■

Michael S. Malone is editor of Forbes ASAP. *Raised in Silicon Valley, he has worked for or against nearly every business mentioned in this article.*

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Inner Circles

After a month of Sundays with the news programs, a reporter finds himself semi-informed and greatly in need of some fresh political air

BY RUSS BAKER

Like the good westerner that he is, Dick Cheney was up early the morning of August 27. But he wasn't out riding, hunting, or fishing. He was diligently answering questions from his Wyoming home via satellite with Tim Russert of NBC's *Meet the Press.* Later that morning the newly anointed GOP vice presidential nominee made himself available to rival networks' political interview programs — CBS's *Face the Nation* and ABC's *This Week* (other Bush spokespeople appeared on CNN's *Late Edition* and *Fox News Sunday*). Whether Cheney really wanted to do this — and he sure looked like he'd rather be gargling vinegar — he was well aware that no serious candidate for high national office can afford to skip the circuit. The Sunday programs may air when most Americans are in bed, at church, or at brunch, but they play a key role in defining the nation's political discourse.

"They're the most serious efforts left at the networks to do public interest news," notes a former NBC News president, Lawrence Grossman. They are watched, at least occasionally, by one-quarter of "highly likely" voters, according to a study commissioned by The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. Yet it's the quality, not the quantity of their audience that gives the Sunday news programs their clout.

Together, they attract news junkies across America, as well as a loyal audience of political insiders along the Washington-New York power corridor, people who can pick apart a politician's performance with the deftness of a master sushi chef. "Sometimes you glean things, you see who is better at spinning," says Richard L. Berke, the *New York Times* political reporter. Berke got his first inkling that Cheney might not be a big plus for the Bush ticket after watching him on three of the shows: "He was on the defensive. He had nothing proactive."

In offering what amounts to a review of the prior week in politics, the Sunday programs have the potential of illuminating some of the complicated issues behind the evening news's sound bites. But what turns on the very attuned may not be all that useful to the ordinary American who wants help in making rational choices on election day. To see how close they come to realizing their potential, I watched all five programs each Sunday during the month of August. This was not a scientific survey, nor is it projected as formal research, but I did get quite an education. Just not the sort I was expecting.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the five interview programs is how similar they are. Considering that they are competitors, one would expect the shows to strive to distinguish themselves. But like candidates jostling to occupy the political center, the Sunday broadcasts seem to expend a lot of time tramping in the same woods. They compete to bring on the guests who are closest to the center of the week's political events or white-hot controversy. Interviewing newsmakers is a fundamental task of journalists. But by cleaving tightly to that formula, these programs risk becoming co-opted by the public relations juggernauts that steer today's politics.

That is true much of the time, but it was amplified in the heat of a presidential campaign. In August, the programs' budgets heavily leaned to politicians, their campaign managers, spokespeople, and surrogates, all merrily spinning the message of the week. David Bianculli, the New York *Daily News* television critic, says the spinners remind him of a performance on the old Ed Sullivan variety show. A juggler would start a number of plates spinning on sticks, then run around keeping them in motion: "On election day," Bianculli says, "whoever has the fewest broken plates wins."

The programs do elicit a measure of insight and candor. But all five Sunday interview shows displayed an excessive tolerance for spin, a frequent failure to follow up a good question with another good question in the face of obfuscation; and to keep the conversation focused on matters of lasting import.

Maybe part of the problem is the programs' eagerness to try to elicit "news," or at least a notable quote that might be picked up by the newspapers on Monday morning when editors are starved for copy. A hunger to make some news has been apparent since the first Sunday interview program, *Meet the Press,* debuted in 1947, when the fledgling medium of TV news was eager for publicity and validation from the traditional print outlets. Av Westin, a former ABC News executive, now a Freedom Forum fellow, believes that TV news still suffers from a "massive inferiority complex."

Today, it is common to see snippets of Sunday programs airing on the same network's evening news, and even on competitors' broadcasts. The programs watch and cite each other, the candidates track and challenge one another's on-air performances, and the whole enterprise has

the feel of a sealed system, living on its own exhausts when it should be letting some fresh air into the political arena.

During August, the players in the rotation included Donna Brazile and William Daley (campaign manager and chairman of the Gore campaign), and Karl Rove and Karen Hughes (Bush's chief strategist and communications director, respectively). They are, as is usually the case with the guests on these programs, professional spinmeisters. And they have their own need to generate news — headlines that reflect their agenda.

No matter who was appearing on which program, there was often an air of complicity between the journalists and the guests. Howard Rosenberg, the *Los Angeles Times* television critic, describes the pact this way: "We've got time, we've got space, you've got a message to deliver, so let's get together."

The lets-get-together spirit was detectable on August 6. ABC's Cokie Roberts, going through the motions of trying to learn who Gore's vice presidential choice would be, posed this coy question to campaign chairman Daley: "John Kerry, like Al Gore, went to St. Albans, [an] exclusive prep school here in Washington. So did Evan Bayh, another person on the so-called short list. Do you think there's a constitutional provision that you can't have two people from St. Albans on the ticket?" Daley appeared amused at sharing a joke with the daughter of two former members of Congress, one who herself attended an exclusive high school. But when Roberts then wondered about the possibility of a woman on the Gore ticket, asking whether one dark horse might be "a filly," Daley summarily cut off further questioning. "I think we ought to probably just end this whole speculation," he said. "It'll be over soon. We should get on to other things."

On CNN's *Late Edition*, Wolf Blitzer quizzed Daley about



Tim Russert, one of the best of the Sunday morning hosts, grills Dick Cheney at his ranch in Wyoming.



Both Wolf Blitzer (above) and Cokie Roberts (below) were soft on Gore campaign chairman William Daley.



Karl Rove, George Bush's chief strategist, frequently answers questions that have not been asked. Brit Hume works to keep his guests on track.



why the Democrats would consider John Edwards, the North Carolina senator, for the vice presidency, when his entire experience in government was limited to seventeen months in the Senate. When Daley lamely cited the former personal injury lawyer's "life experience," Blitzer did not press him further.

Yet follow-up is critical in this format. When moderators throw out thoughtful questions or zingers, the well-primed guests often offer the stock response from their inventory that most closely matches the question — and that advances the campaign's message-of-the-week. They often answer a question that wasn't asked. On August 6, Fox's Tony Snow challenged Rove about the Bush campaign's implicit message that Gore inherits the questions about character that always trailed President Clinton. "Let's be honest, aren't there real differences in their personal behavior?" The spinmeister simply converted the premise: "No, there's no difference between them as far as the tone that they want to set in Washington." With no resistance from Snow, he continued to answer a question, about Gore/Clinton policy similarities, that had not been asked, instead of the one about character differences.

Easy as pie for guys like Rove. Andrew Tyndall, publisher of *The Tyndall Report*, a newsletter that monitors nightly network newscasts, notes that "the interviewees are so well-rehearsed and drilled that they'll give new information if they feel like giving it — if they want to provide the guy with a scoop. But if they don't want to, they won't. And it won't matter how you ask the question. The newsmaking function is in the hands of the guests, not in the hands of the journalists."

Clearly, some formats work better than others. On August 27, Tim Russert sought to explore differences between the Gore and Bush tax plans through an impromptu debate between Senator John Kerry and Representative John Kasich. Many industry ob-

servers describe Russert as the best of the Sunday morning hosts. He is prepared, and he makes effective use of lead-ins and video clips that can force guests to face up to prior statements. But in this case, Kerry and Kasich both proved so masterful at self-serving spin that we never got close to learning which tax plan was better for which Americans.

Later that morning, CNN's Blitzer found a better way to get at an answer: borrowing from print. He displayed a graphic from the accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche (as published in *Time*), showing that low- and moderate-income Americans save more under the Gore plan, while the wealthiest taxpayers benefit heavily from Bush's. The numbers left the Bush representative, Senator Chuck Hagel, saying he hadn't seen the study — but finally falling back on a more controversial, interesting, and probably more authentic statement of conservative philosophy: that those who pay the most should get the most back.

On his August 20 program, Russert sought to draw attention to Gore's spending plan and its reliance on a rosy economic forecast. How, he asked chairman Daley of the Gore campaign, could the candidate base a budget on expected surpluses yet oppose privatizing Social Security as "too risky?" Aren't both dependent on a strong economy, and therefore risky? Credit Russert with a good try, but these are complicated matters, and this quickie stab involved comparing mangoes and kiwis. No concession emerged from Daley and no new understanding of Gore's fiscal model.

On August 27, along with CBS's Bob Schieffer and ABC's Sam Donaldson, Russert took Cheney to task for some of the Bush campaign's assertions that the U.S. had lost its edge in military readiness. Bush had claimed that two army divisions were not prepared for combat. But the hosts were able to cite statistics and contrary assertions from high-ranking military figures, that these divisions are indeed combat-ready (and always were). Cheney tried to squirm out of this, but was unable to dispute that the Bush campaign had in this case relied on some outdated information.

Notably less effective were Donaldson's efforts on August 13 to raise legitimate questions about Senator Joseph Lieberman's ties to the very same pharmaceutical and insurance companies that the Democratic ticket was bashing on the campaign trail. Lieberman expertly deflected the inquiry, saying that while there were differences between his and Gore's approaches to patients' rights, they were not big and would be resolved in private. Donaldson never pursued the issue to find out how Lieberman felt about the influence of such companies and their contributions on officials such as himself. Nor did he expand the discussion to the larger, more important issue of campaign finance reform.

Faced with such well-coached guests, the most important thing a moderator can do is press for specifics and challenge inadequate answers — in short, follow up. Russert, who comes from a background in politics, is one of the best at follow-up. But in August it seemed to be Fox, periodically accused of journalistic bias and sometimes not taken seriously, that showed a bulldog's tenacity.

In one particularly good exchange on August 6, Brit Hume asked Rove how Bush (who made much of his dislike for "negativity") could insist that he was not attacking Clinton when he talked about "restoring honor and integrity" to the White House. Rove spun. Hume fired again: "But 'restoring' implies you're bringing something back that isn't there.

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'The bottom line is they ought to be better: demanding clearer answers, halting spin, and taking the time to tease out an issue'

Is that not inescapably a reference to Bill Clinton?" When Rove began to repeat his previous answer (a sure sign that a reporter is onto something) Hume jumped in again: "But how can it be anything else? And what's wrong with saying it?" Overall, Hume proved the most aggressive, persistent, no-nonsense host and demonstrated a willingness to listen carefully to his guests and respond accordingly.

ABC's polite, amiable, almost familial Cokie Roberts was consistently ineffective on follow-up questions. During a short interview with Ralph Nader, she asked the consumer advocate about criticism that his platform stressed economic issues and corporate power to the exclusion of more controversy-provoking matters like guns, abortion, and gay rights. Nader offered a short and incomplete reply, but rather than follow up, Roberts moved on to another question, and then declared herself to be out of time. The program was not really out of time, but was moving on to other, softer portions of the broadcast — including a pundit discussion of how a focus group liked Tipper and Karenna Gore.

In fact, there is usually plenty of time to either grill the spinners at greater length or offer more substantive analysis. The NBC, ABC, and Fox shows are all sixty minutes long; CNN runs ninety minutes; only CBS squeezes the political give-and-take into a half-hour. What eats up a lot of this time are the discussion among the journalists and pundits themselves, which are sometimes valuable for their insights, often less so.

On August 13, for example, Donaldson wanted his pundits to explain Gore's supposed inability to persuade the public that he is his "own man," and Bush's greater effectiveness at image projection. If you think about it, those questions are just as much about the media and the nature of image-shaping — including image-shaping on Sunday morning — as about the candidates.

These programs are probably not prepared to accept the thought that they may be part of the problem. Protesting the media's persistent emphasis on Gore's style rather than his substance, Jack Germond, a *Meet the Press* regular, asked on August 20, "Why does he have to be scintillating? Why do we have to be theater critics?" Instead of responding to the substance of the complaint, host Russert shot back "Jack Germond, how about the kiss?" (a reference to the Al-Tipper post-coronation smooch). And the delighted pundits were off and running.

Not all are the same. I used an informal system to help my evaluation, weighing the quality of questions, follow-through, demeanor, preparedness, thoroughness, and substance. Brit Hume was the most impressive. A well-prepared Tim Russert followed, with the rest grouped more or less together, except for Cokie Roberts, who has work to do.

As a steady diet, the Sunday interview programs have a certain eat-Chinese-food-be-hungry-an-hour-later quality. The bottom line is, while they are intermittently entertaining and sporadically penetrating, they ought to be better: demanding clearer, more accurate answers, halting spin in its tracks, and taking the time to tease out an issue and increase understanding. The hosts, commentators, and producers could invest more resources in researching claims and creating effective visuals — including charts and graphs — to illustrate the relevant facts. They could decide which issues matter and raise them energetically and relentlessly rather than be chained only to the utterances and events of the previous week. Newsmakers are a necessary part of the diet. But the programs could risk putting on some wise but less recognizable observers and analysts to escape the spin cycle. Most of all, they could recognize the central role that the media have played in freezing ordinary citizens out American politics, and start asking themselves a few tough questions. ■

Russ Baker writes frequently for CJR. *Additional reporting by Megan Costello.*

The Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism

The Mental Health Program of The Carter Center in Atlanta, Ga., announces six one-year journalism fellowships. Designed to enhance public understanding of mental health issues and combat stigma and discrimination against people with mental illnesses, the fellowships begin in September 2001.

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God and Man on the Campaign Trail

BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

In the modern era of "objective" journalism, political campaign reporting at its best has been a rational, empirical process. Journalists press candidates for specifics on their programs and probe for inconsistencies and weaknesses in their policies. They sniff out lies and dig for evidence to expose them. They tell us exactly how and by what techniques campaigns are propagandizing the voters.

But in at least one important respect, 2000 has not been a traditional campaign year. Candidates have injected religion into the debate more often and with greater fervor than in any presidential contest in memory. In the face of these religious stirrings, the standard empirical approach to covering candidate claims has revealed its limitations, which is hardly surprising. How could reporters be expected to verify a candidate's claim to be a believer? How could reporters effectively apply rational analysis and enterprise reporting to assertions of divine instruction? Even a dogged investigator like Michael Isikoff would be hard-pressed to prove or disprove the existence of God. And a flexible deadline wouldn't help.

Despite the difficulties, news organizations have made a serious effort to cover the religious side of the present race for the White House. These efforts and their shortcomings suggest lessons for future coverage. I'll get to these after a brief review of the course of the religious revival in campaign 2000.

One got an inkling of what was to come as early as May 1999, when Vice President Al Gore declared in a speech: "Faith is the center of my life . . . . I don't wear it on my sleeve." Sleeve display was not long in coming, however. In a July 12 *Washington Post* profile, the Democratic front-runner said he always asked himself a simple question when faced with tough decisions — "What would Jesus do?" or WWJD for short. The candidate later declared himself born again to an audience of millions in a December 1999 interview on *60 Minutes*.

Gore was only the beginning. When Republican presidential candidates squared off in Iowa in December, a debate panelist asked them to name their favorite philosopher.

"Christ, because he changed my heart," replied the GOP



AP WIDE WORLD/STEVE MILLER

Joe Lieberman, shown here leaving services at a New Haven synagogue, put religious values on his agenda.



George W. Bush, shown here at Bob Jones University, said his favorite philosopher is Jesus.

front-runner, Governor George W. Bush, who in June proclaimed "Jesus Day" in Texas. Jesus is not generally categorized as a mere philosopher, but one got the impression that Bush was primed and that other questions might have drawn the same response. (Who is your favorite c.e.o.? Celebrity? Political consultant?) In any event, candidates Orrin Hatch, Gary Bauer, and others rushed to echo W.'s praise of Jesus. Religious testimonials became a significant news angle in the debate story.

It may be mere coincidence, but two candidates who were slow to sing hallelujah lost out in the primaries — Republican John McCain, who said in the debate that his favorite philosopher was Theodore Roosevelt, and Democrat Bill Bradley, who tried to play by the old rules, insisting that religious beliefs were private. Later, however, Bradley tossed out the occasional platitude about his belief in God; and McCain, the salty ex-naval aviator, pointed out in campaign ads that he had preached sermons to fellow P.O.W.s in the Hanoi Hilton. But by March the two latecomers were history.

The campaign's religious rhythm quickened in August when nominee Gore threw the Old Testament into the mix, selecting Connecticut's Senator Joe Lieberman to be the first Jewish member of a major-party ticket. Declaring that religious values had to play a greater role in political life, Lieberman, an observant modern Orthodox Jew, drew enthusiastic crowds (and extensive, largely favorable news coverage), even in the Bible Belt. When he asserted that "morality cannot be maintained without religion," however, he drew criticism from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, which warned that government should never support "the religious over the nonreligious." Lieberman then acknowledged that an atheist could be a good president and seemed to temper his religious rhetoric slightly. Even so, he evidently "boosted the Democrats' standing with voters on the moral issue by 7 percentage points," *The Washington Post* reported September 30, citing its own poll.

What were reporters to make of Lieberman and his message, and the power of religious themes in the campaign overall?

Journalists wrestling with these questions tended to agree on some key points, according to my informal survey of news analyses of the religious issue in five major newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *USA Today*). They agreed that years of unprecedented prosperity had left voters yearning for some deeper meaning in life. They agreed that years of being exposed to one Clintonian ethical lapse after another had left voters bitter about current presidential mores. (Sixty-two percent said more religion is needed in public life, according to the *Post*'s September poll.) The newspaper analyses also agreed that the candidates, by stressing their own religious values, were responding to the public's spiritual yearning and at the same time working to inoculate themselves against the presidential-image blight The Man From Hope had spread.

One might add that neither Bush nor Gore was a candidate of strong ideological fervor, so each was vulnerable to being tagged an opportunist, offering the country little more than his own ambition. Religion was the antidote, a way of ennobling their respective campaigns. As the historian Daniel Boorstin wrote in *The Image*, "One of the oldest of man's visions was the flash of divinity in the great man. He seemed to appear for reasons men could not understand, and the secret of his greatness was God's secret . . . ." If the two campaigns could not generate a flash of divinity, they were at least trying to create a small spark.

Seeds of this new religious campaigning can also be found in the relentless probing by the press corps itself. Since *The Miami Herald* launched its investigation of Gary Hart and Donna Rice in 1987, "character reporting" has expanded to squeeze out all but the tiniest zone of privacy for candidates. They now fear exposure of any unfavorable detail of their lives. They vie to counter the potential damage by shoveling out in-

AP WIDE WORLD/ERIC GAY

Religion moved from a polarizing force to the latest version of "mom 'n' apple pie" politics.

timate details that voters will see as positive — the declaration of religious faith, once a largely private matter, being the most striking example in this campaign.

And the hardest for journalists to handle. Ignoring such a declaration because it is, at some level, unverifiable and propagandistic would be shirking the duty to report what happens. Reporting such a declaration uncritically would make the media mere conduits for the candidate's "message." Questioning the sincerity of the candidate's faith would be unfair, unless the reporter could document insincerity — an impossible task in most cases. In short, covering the religion angle is highly frustrating. But as an old-time journalist once put it, "That which ye sow also shall ye reap, and the fool shall be servant to the wise in heart."

Despite the frustrations, traditional fact-based skeptical reporting can be of some use in covering politicians' God-talk. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind.

PUSH to get candidates to spell out connections between their religious declarations and their political policies. It was not difficult to establish such connections back when the Religious Right was at the height of its power. That movement's candidates sought the repeal of *Roe* v. *Wade*, supported school prayer and the teaching of "creation science," and so on. But with the Religious Right fragmented between GOP candidates in 2000, George W. Bush was able to duck some of the right's most controversial agenda items. He was able to use religious rhetoric to rally support not only from conservatives, but from moderates.

Gore, meanwhile, countered an elitist image by casting himself as one of the tens of millions of mainstream "born-again" Americans. Both Bush and Gore agree that government should help faith-based charities minister to the poor and that issue was amply covered by the press this year. But typically the candidates worked to blur any policy implications in their religious rhetoric, to squeeze the ideology out of revivalist politics. Religion, in short, moved from being a polarizing force (mainly on the right) to being the latest version of "mom 'n' apple pie" politics. Religion became a weapon in the see-saw battle between Democrats and Republicans to capture the "mainstream" flag.

It is always incumbent on reporters to try to expose platitudes and irrelevancies for what they are, and to tease out campaign agendas and policy implications that lie hidden in revivalist politics. To some extent, media tried to do that this year, writing extensively, for instance, about the apparent strategic rationales behind campaign God-talk. On one occasion, Tim Russert boldly asked Bush — who as governor has presided over some 140 executions, including that of the born-again Christian Karla Faye Tucker — if Jesus supported capital punishment. Bush squirmed away, passing the judgment buck to Higher Authority, but seeing him do so was no doubt instructive for *Meet the Press* viewers. More of this sort of questioning was called for, especially on TV forums with large audiences. Take Gore's "What Would Jesus Do?" mantra, for


John S. Knight

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James L. Knight

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example, and his support for Clinton's bombing campaign in Kosovo. Imagine the questions a Bernard Shaw might have asked: "What targets would Jesus have selected? How many 'missions' would He have dispatched?"

PRESS candidates to address other implications of their religious rhetoric. I would like, for instance, to have seen reporters probe whether born-again Protestantism is necessarily comparable with the candidates' rhetoric of inclusion and inter-denominational bliss. Media did make much of Bush's visit to Bob Jones University, whose president is an ardent anti-papist and whose code of conduct has barred interracial dating. Beyond that, a suitable question to Gore and Bush might have been: "Given your belief in salvation by conversion through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, don't you have to maintain that Joe Lieberman is barred from the Kingdom of Heaven because he is Jewish?" Bush once dealt with such a question as a candidate for governor. He passed the buck to God, saying that George W. Bush was not the one to decide on salvation — but adding, paradoxically, that the New Testament did seem to say that only true Christians could make it into heaven. A reporter should have pressed the question again, and harder, in 2000. If a candidate's faith is deemed relevant to the voters by the candidate himself, then the broad implications of his beliefs deserve to be covered.

PROBE to determine how well the contenders understand the theologies they profess. Several columnists challenged Bush's statement that "our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be the model to the world of justice and inclusion and diversity without division." Moderator Lehrer might have pressed the matter in one of the live presidential debates, asking, "What is the scriptural basis for your claim that God selected America to be such a model? Did God make that decision before or after the Emancipation Proclamation? Before or after Vietnam tore the country apart? Before or after the race riots in Los Angeles that followed acquittal of police officers in the Rodney King beating case? Are you saying we are now the very model of justice and unity?"

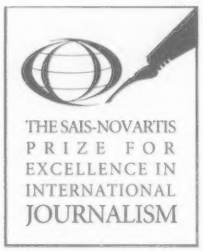
AVOID stereotyping. Most coverage of Gore's selection of Lieberman did so, but there were some disturbing exceptions, which the Anti-Defamation League brought to CJR's attention. An editorial in the *Amsterdam News*, which has a largely African-American readership, declared: "Gore and his minions did it for the money .... The word went out all over the world to Jews in every pocket of civilization and near-civilization, that the major protector of Jews in this world, the American government, is now available. But in order to get it, you've got to buy it." The column was exceptional for its bile and crudeness, but caricaturing was apparent in some other coverage as well. The *New York Post* ran the Yiddish expression OY VEY! as a massive headline on its August 7 front page.

WNBC, a New York City network affiliate with a huge audience, ran a story strongly implying that Lieberman had violated Jewish law by campaigning on Tisha b'av, a holy day commemorating the Jews' endurance despite their oppressors. The piece quoted the rabbi at the modern Orthodox Lincoln Square Synagogue saying that Lieberman should have been in temple. The broadcast went on to report that Lieberman would have to miss eight days of campaigning because of high holy days and the sabbath. The insinuation of the piece,



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inadvertent perhaps but surely unfair, was that Joe Lieberman is either a bad Jew or a bad candidate, or both. By singling out issues of Judaic observance, the report reinforced the view that Jews are alien, not like "the rest of America." To my knowledge, there was no comparable scrutiny of the religious observance of other candidates — no investigations of whether Gore or Bush could be violating the Christian sabbath or how much money the GOP vice presidential candidate, Dick Cheney, was putting in the collection plate.

The problem of singling out Jews also came up when Lehrer asked the following question during the August 9 *NewsHour* on PBS: "Is it safe for [viewers] to expect that when, if [Lieberman] becomes vice president of the United States, that he's confronted with a government situation, that he would go first to Jewish law or Jewish custom or his beliefs or his orthodox Jewish beliefs in making that decision?" One of Lehrer's guests, the Columbia University journalism professor, Samuel Freedman, author of *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle For the Soul of American Jewry*, replied that the question was "nonsensical and ill-grounded," like the questions in 1960 about whether Catholic candidate John Kennedy would take his orders from the pope. In fact, Lehrer's question was not nonsensical: Kennedy, after all, insisted that his political decisions would be based strictly on secular considerations; Lieberman, on the other hand, was urging that faith play a big part in political life, which made the question fair game potentially. The question was indeed "ill-grounded" under the circumstances, however, because similar questions were not being asked of the gentile candidates. Lehrer's query thus reinforced the notion that Jews are strange outsiders, demanding special scrutiny.

Beyond the question of equal treatment is the matter of that small sphere of what remains private. Unless there is a connection between a politician's means of worship (or lack thereof) and public performance, one would hope that reporters would respect some zone of religious privacy, even given today's obsession with character. Do we want WNBC to determine whether the Reform party's candidate, Pat Buchanan, a Catholic, is making it to confession — or even to plant a hidden camera to see if he is doing his penance? ("Buchanan 'Hail Mary' shortfall! Film at 11!") Do we want Geraldo Rivera to investigate whether Lieberman's wife, Hadassah, is obeying Orthodox law by taking the prescribed ritual baths at a mikvah to "cleanse" herself each month? These might seem far-fetched examples, but the principle behind them seems very much in keeping with the Tisha b'av "exclusive." Where is the link to performance in office?

SHUN hagiography. There is no clear connection between religiosity and effectiveness in office. Even so, the year 2000 witnessed something new in campaign reporting — massive newspaper profiles that chronicled the spiritual progress of the candidates. Some of these profiles came close to puffery. Consider, for instance, *The Washington Post*'s sixty-seven-paragraph July 24 piece on Bush's path to salvation and personal growth. It recounts how the candidate transformed himself into a serious public servant with the help of Jesus Christ. Once, W. was something of a wiseacre and a lightweight, the *Post* tells us. When the discussion leader in his Bible study group asked him about the day's reading — "What happened to the Jew on the way to Jericho?" — the unprepared Bush could only quip: "He got his butt whipped." Once, W. drank to excess. But with the help of his Bible group and the encouragement of the Rev. Billy Graham, W. grew in spirit and depth until he had his epiphany, his "born again" conversion. He

quit drinking and smoking, seized control of his life, grew dramatically more mature. "Bush was now changed," the article declared. He was ready to face the mounting challenges of business and politics with the help of personal prayer. "Mostly, it's just him and his Bible," a Bush associate told the *Post*.

Wait a minute. Bush might indeed be a fundamentally changed man, but how can we really know? The only sources quoted to back up this thesis of transformation were Bush, his friends, and his family. These are not exactly unbiased witnesses. Indeed, the *Post*'s story-line was the very one the Bush campaign itself is anxious to promote — in order to assure voters that the candidate's barstool days are over and that his finger on the nuclear trigger would be cautious and controlled, not impulsive or shaky.

Since heavy drinking does affect performance in office, perhaps the newspaper should not have taken the word of the Bush camp at face value. A pinch of skepticism would have been welcome. At the very least, the *Post* should have acknowledged directly that it was accepting the idea of a New Bush based on the testimony of interested parties and on limited personal observation — that is, essentially only on faith. As H. L. Mencken once wrote, "There are times and occasions . . . when a newspaper's duty to its readers requires it to tell them not only what has happened but also . . . what is merely said. What I contend is simply that such quasi-news, such half-baked and still dubious news, should be printed for exactly what it is." In other words, make clear to readers what the reporter does — and doesn't — know.

The words "half-baked" and "dubious" are perhaps too pejorative in the present context. "Unknown" would be an appropriate substitute, for deep personal change based on born-again faith is surely too existential an experience for any uninitiated outsider to comprehend, let alone verify. Even so, outward signs of personal transformation can be investigated by traditional news methods up to a point. Does everyone who knew Bush agree that he is a new man? Has he ever fallen off the wagon? Somewhere there might be evidence to help answer these questions.

Of course, there are limits to scientific or "objective" reporting and these extend beyond the facts. The empirical journalist's mind-set is not just skeptical but often almost hostile to faith-based beliefs. Mencken himself dismissed fundamentalists as dupes of superstition who were blind to hard, scientific facts. Many national political reporters — including yours truly and many of my colleagues — brought a similar bias toward coverage of the Religious Right in the 1980s. We had a hard time taking seriously or respecting the political legitimacy of those who believed, for instance, that God created the world in seven literal, twenty-four-hour days. In the interest of fairness, any reporter covering religion in politics should try taking stock of his or her own prejudices and assumptions, including, perhaps, even the assumption that "objective" reporting is a method of truth seeking. It can, of course, be viewed alternatively as an assertion of faith — faith that skeptical inquiry will result in sounder voting. By this light, uncovering facts and placing them before the voters is an act of prayer — a prayer that the journalist hopes will be answered in voting booths across America on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. ■

Christopher Hanson, a contributing editor to CJR, *teaches journalism at the University of Maryland. He worked for twenty years as a reporter in Washington, D.C., and overseas.*

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BIG DEAL IN VEGAS

And How the Local Press Missed It

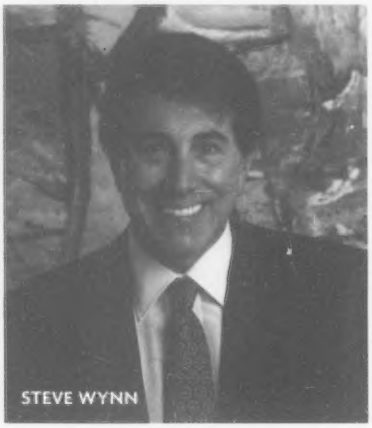


BY SALLY DENTON AND ROGER MORRIS

Worldwide headlines heralded the deal. On March 6, the MGM Grand mogul Kirk Kerkorian captured Steve Wynn's Mirage Resorts in a $6.4 billion takeover that created a vast oligopoly in the trillion-dollar casino industry. But in Las Vegas, headquarters of the oligarchs, the history-making buyout went largely unexplored by the local press, another sign of how much America's fastest-growing city has become hostage to the corporate lords of gambling.

The takeover left more than a dozen of the largest hotels on the strip owned by just two companies. Kerkorian's new MGM-Mirage colossus emerged with controlling interests in nearly half of gambling's global empire, which reaches forty-seven states, scores of Indian reservations, and dozens of foreign countries. The stakes are enormous. Thirty-four million people visit Las Vegas yearly, 127 million more frequent casinos nationally. By the year 2000, Americans were spending more on gambling than almost all sports and entertainment combined.

The deal was a resounding business story: the buccaneering Wynn — prodigal son become reigning king — now seen as one more profligate c.e.o. besieged by shareholders. His nemesis, the billionaire octogenarian Kerkorian, the "Lion of Las Vegas" to the local media, was known in the zoology of the national press simply as the "old jackal," or "Wall Street's nastiest raider." Behind the familiar profiles of the two men were richer, relatively untold stories. But in a city constantly reinventing reality, burying history, and throwing up glitzy new facades, Las Vegans found little of substance in the local coverage of the most important transaction in the annals of the Strip.



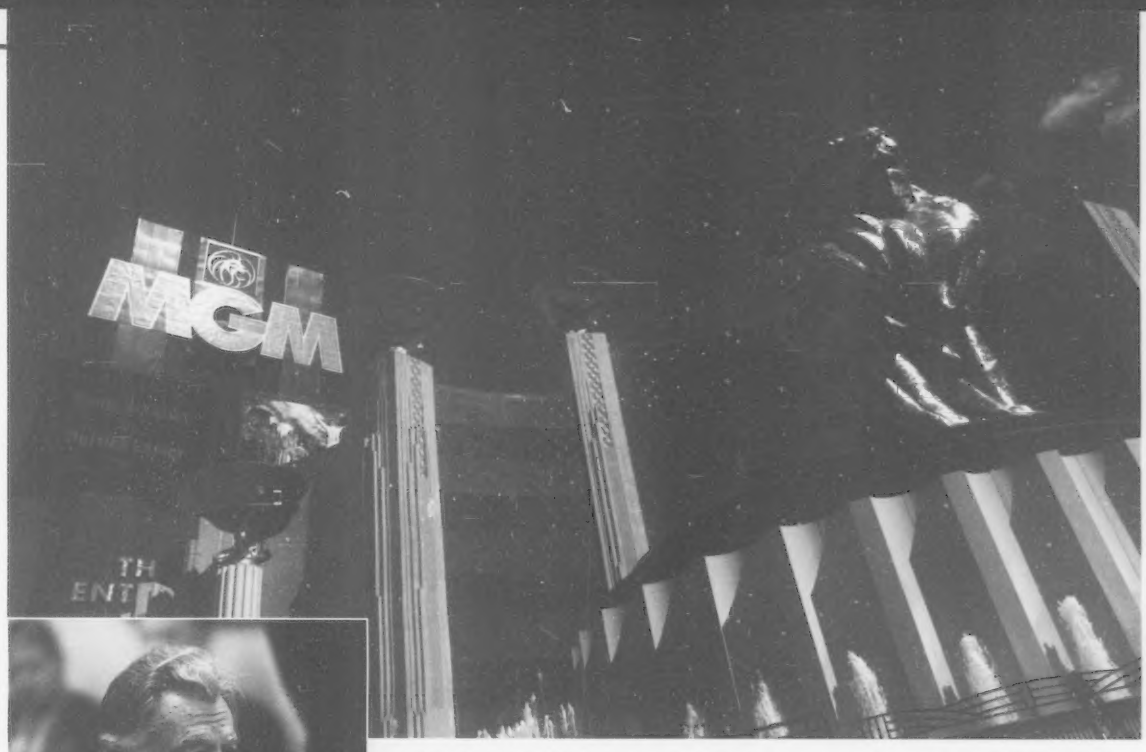
STEVE WYNN

Las Vegas's latest coup — bid per share replacing a bullet — was seen by many as another cleansing of excess in a tradition begun with the mob execution of Bugsy Siegel in 1947. Readers of *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, and other business journals knew for months that Wynn's Mirage was "ripe for takeover," as one account put it, and that Kerkorian was jockeying to acquire it. Wynn, given to lucrative personal stock options, sweetheart corporate leases of his art, and the seating of his wife on the board; and with a $2.5 million annual salary, $1.25 million annual bonus, and $5.2 million leasing arrangement that made him one of the most lavishly paid executives in the U.S., had watched Mirage stock plummet from a high of $26.38 in May 1999 to $10.88 at the end of January. There had been reports of outbursts of Wynn's temper and bizarre behavior at an investors' gathering last winter. It all stoked shareholder unrest. "Why haven't they thrown the bum out?" the *New York Observer*'s Christopher Byron asked two months before Kerkorian's move.

Just as Wynn was teetering on the corporate edge last spring, *The Independent* of London summed up his Nevada power with a candor unknown in the Las Vegas press. "Politicians jumped at his command, candidates prostrated themselves to seek his endorsement and his campaign contributions, city planners re-routed roads and sewers at his behest, water authorities allowed him to siphon off millions of precious gallons to feed his private golf course . . ."

Despite the national coverage, Kerkorian's takeover struck the Strip like a thunderbolt out of a clear desert sky. Neither the *Review-Journal* (circulation 214,000) nor the *Las Vegas Sun* (circulation 225,000) had reported how shaky Wynn's hold had become, leaving readers stunned by the purchase. "Las Vegans would have had to go to a library to find out what was happening in an industry that totally dominates their state," said one retired journalist. "I am still in shock," the *Sun*'s owner, Brian Greenspun, wrote days after the takeover. "I just don't remember our coverage," said the *Sun* editor, Mike Kelly. Repeated calls

AP WIDEWORLD





KIRK KERKORIAN

Unlike the national business press, Las Vegas papers were stunned when Kirk Kerkorian's MGM Grand Hotel and Casino bought out Steve Wynn's Mirage Resorts.

to others at the paper, including publisher Greenspun, went unanswered.

The MGM-Mirage deal was a classic example of what much of Las Vegas journalism has become at the millennium — euphemistically calling the hostile takeover a "merger," masking the humiliation of a tycoon who had been off-limits to critical reporting. Local stories attributed the decline of Mirage stock to Las Vegas competition, Wynn's "frustration with Wall Street," and losses at his Mississippi casino. The *Review-Journal* portrayed Wynn and Kerkorian as "both shrewd businessmen whose power is matched only by their fortunes," and praised Wynn as a "lofty visionary." For its part in the most important business story in the city's history, the *Sun* relied mostly upon The Associated Press. Its own reporters wrote a fluffy feature on how Kerkorian had "pumped life into MGM," and on how Wynn was known for "parlaying family contacts and a knack for smart investment." As if to sum up the blithe reporting in both papers, the *Review-Journal* blandly editorialized that Wynn was exiting "a winner."

"I think we could have done a better job, but we did a pretty good one covering the high points," said the *Review-Journal*'s editor, Tom Mitchell. "It was a complex deal and I'm sure there were backroom deals we'll never know." Mitchell added that since the transaction the paper has hired three new reporters to cover the gambling industry.

While his face was being saved at home, national coverage of Wynn was less indulgent. "The most powerful man in Las Vegas is fighting a rising chorus of investor discontent over spiraling costs and the timing of financial disclosure," said *Business Week* in December 1999. *The Independent* of London revealed that Wynn had nearly lost his license in Atlantic City "after a Mafioso called Tony Castelbuono was caught recycling the profits of heroin trafficking at the gambling tables." The March 9, 2000, article referred specifically to a lengthy, 1983 Scotland Yard file alleging Wynn's "links to the Genovese Cosa Nostra family." Scotland Yard had investigated Wynn when he sought a gaming license in Great Britain, and Wynn had subsequently withdrawn the license application. But that famous decision had never made it in any detail into the Las Vegas newspapers.

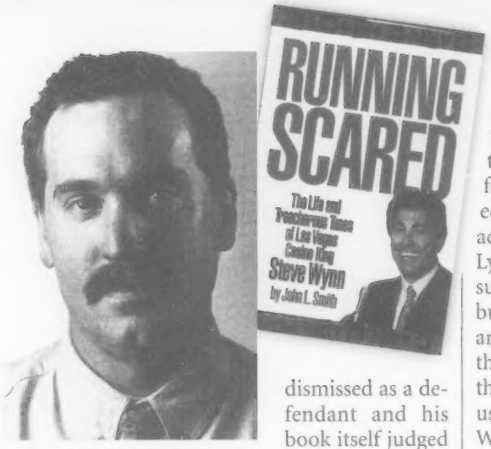
Apart from that murky history, *The New York Times* reported the deal as less the result of Wynn's dissatisfaction with Wall Street than Wall Street's skepticism about Wynn. *Time* similarly noted in its March 6 issue that "hours after Kerkorian launched his offer, five Mirage shareholders brought class actions in Las Vegas to demand that Wynn and his board seriously consider all bids." Another report in *Mergers and Acquisitions Journal* cited the departure of a top Mirage executive, Dan Lee, who had been highly critical of Wynn's management style. Among the intriguing stories after the deal was an April 10 piece in the *New York Observer* describing "a cozy agreement . . . for Mr. Wynn to purchase masterworks at below-market-prices — and sell them again to interested parties." One buyer was the media magnate S.I. Newhouse, a longtime Wynn friend, who boarded his corporate jet the night before Wynn's exit from Mirage to dine with the casino kingpin as part of Newhouse's effort to acquire a 1942 Picasso. But little of this colorful by-play was elaborated or analyzed in Las Vegas.

"I long ago learned that if I wanted to know what was happening in Las Vegas

MGM, AP WIDEWORLD/LAURA RAUCH, KERKORIAN, AP WIDEWORLD/ROGELIO SOLIS

I had to read the *Los Angeles Times*," a local historian says in reflecting on the Las Vegas coverage of the buyout.

Las Vegas journalism was not always so tame. Nevada was once known for its courageous and independent press. Mark Twain had made history taking on the mining, railroad, and cattle barons from his pulpit as writer for the Virginia City, Nevada, *Territorial Enterprise*. A century later, the *Sun*'s founder, Hank Greenspun, was briefly one of the nation's publishing legends — a lone voice against Nevada boss Pat McCarran and Wisconsin demagogue Joe McCarthy. But if he once took on tyrants and even prominent Strip gangsters like the Cleveland thug Moe Dalitz, who owned the Desert Inn and whose philanthropy made him a civic hero, Greenspun also yearned to be an inside player. "Greenspun's substantial holdings . . . have made him so rich," *Time* reported in 1975, "that he may be losing his maverick feistiness."



John L. Smith's biography brought a million-dollar lawsuit

The abdication reduced the *Sun* to the paleness of the older *Review-Journal*, which took a diffident view of the Strip's powerful masters. "From this day forward, Mr. Siegel of the Flamingo will never be referred to as 'Bugsy,' " read a 1946 posting in the *R-J* newsroom. A longtime *R-J* editor, Al Cahlan, himself owned a piece of a casino. By the 1990s, the substantial kinship between the *Sun* and *Review-Journal* was sealed with a joint operating agreement, and Las Vegas's gambling empire was safer than ever from prying local journalism.

Notably missing from local coverage of the Kerkorian-Wynn deal was the Wynn biographer John L. Smith. Smith's 1995 biography, *Running Scared: The Life and Treacherous Times of Las Vegas Casino King Steve Wynn*, had detailed accounts of Wynn's continuing proximity to organized crime, and promptly drew down a sweeping libel suit in which a Las Vegas jury found for Wynn in August 1997, bankrupting the publisher, Barricade Books. Though Smith was personally dismissed as a defendant and his book itself judged libel-free — the litigation was over the wording in the publisher's catalogue — the suit made it awkward if not impossible for the city's most respected journalist to write about Wynn lest it be perceived as a vendetta.

While Smith keeps turning out his enormously popular column, and insists that he's never had a story killed by *Review-Journal* editors, he rarely mentions Wynn. But the impact of what he and others refer to as the libel suit's "big chill" is not always visible. What happened to Smith as the author of a meticulously researched book on the premier businessman and political patron, is illustrative of the fate of Las Vegas journalism.

"John L. is one of the two or three all-time best reporters in Nevada and maybe in the entire American West," says a competing editor who asked not to be identified. A fourth-generation Nevadan whose family has been in the state since 1881, Smith was one of six children of a hard-working union painter and his political-activist wife in the sprawling Las Vegas suburb of Henderson. After graduating from Western Washington University, he began as a sportswriter at the *Sun* in the early 1980s and soon graduated to a daily opinion piece at the *Review-Journal*. "I saw him as the rocket here and tried to open doors that had long been shut," Smith says of covering Wynn. "Other reporters were afraid to upset him because they wanted access to him as a source for stories. I knew he couldn't be a source for a story because he *was* the story."

According to several accounts, when Wynn learned that Smith was writing *Running Scared*, he called the reporter's bosses demanding to know what the paper was "going to do" about the writer. Editors told Smith not to mention the book in his column, but before the biography was even completed, Wynn filed a multimillion-dollar action against Smith and his publisher, Lyle Stuart and Barricade Books. The suit was directed not at *Running Scared*, but at the catalog copy written by Stuart. Paraphrasing the Scotland Yard file that Wynn had "been operating under the aegis" of organized crime, Stuart used the term "front man" to describe Wynn because he thought "aegis" would not be commonly understood. The *Review-Journal* reported the case on page 5B, under the headline WYNN SUES LOCAL WRITER, an inside-page obscurity Smith has never forgotten. "That's when I knew I was on my own," he says. Las Vegas's most powerful businessman was suing its pre-eminent journalist over issues at the heart of the history and legitimacy of the state's ruling industry, and the story was treated as a relatively minor dispute.

When Smith was dropped from the case before the trial began in July 1997, Wynn went to the Nevada Supreme Court to appeal his removal. "He wants to bust you out," Stuart told Smith, using casino parlance. Meanwhile, lavish character witnesses appeared for Wynn, including Governor Bob Miller of Nevada and Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas, both of whom had received contributions from Wynn and, in Jones's case, transportation on the Mirage corporate jet. "Las Vegas is the quid pro quo capital of the world," Smith says of the politicians. "It hurts, and reminds you of how small you are in the system. Steve Wynn's influence in our society has been great and deep. It's hard to sit there and watch as your side catches the frowns from the judge and the other side gets all the smiles and accolades." A Las Vegas jury initially awarded Wynn $3.1 million for punitive and compensatory damages. As the verdict came in, Wynn was at the Mirage hosting President Bill Clinton, himself a recipient of Wynn contributions.

By the time of the Kerkorian buyout last March, Stuart's appeal of the verdict was before the Nevada Supreme Court, where Wynn's lawyers still sought to restore Smith as a defendant. At a June 16

MANY REPORTERS END UP ON THE CASINOS' P.R. STAFFS

hearing, a judge pointed out that all seven justices of the highest court had received contributions from Wynn's empire, though none regarded the money as disqualifying. (A decision is expected later this year.)

"Did they let me keep my job despite every effort by Wynn to fire me? You bet they did," Smith says of the *Review-Journal* editors after the explosive revelations of *Running Scared*. "Did they assign a team of investigative reporters to check out the facts? No." His disappointment is plain. "It gets pretty lonely when no one else wants to rock the boat. It's not that you can't write critically about Wynn, but if you do you get the whining, threatening, and cajoling that comes with it. It's not that editors are killing stories. Reporters just don't want the hassle. They're terrified of getting sued. And I can see why. I had sources who were themselves worth $300 million afraid to go on the record about Wynn."

Geoff Schumacher, editor of Las Vegas's lively if lower-circulation alternative weekly, *City Life*, whose relatively penetrative coverage of the deal included major feature stories as well as much commentary, echoes the theme of suppression by default. "There's not a restriction at the *Sun* or *R-J* against criticizing Wynn or the industry," he says. "They either self-censor or they're just not very good, aggressive reporters. It's a built-in lazy culture."

Local critics point to several reasons for the unevenness of the Las Vegas press, though typically not for attribution in a town where few are willing to speak openly. Las Vegas reporters, they say, have been notoriously underpaid for decades. Like many cities its size in the American West, Las Vegas was both journalistic waystation and backwater. "If you were aiming to move up and get out of town and wanted to do good reporting, your editors would be leery," says a University of Nevada professor. "But if you hoped to stay in town, you didn't want to piss off anybody in the casinos who you might want to hire you later." The judgment seems borne out by the number of reporters who, like elected politicians and other public officials, tend to end up on the public relations staffs of casinos. There are literally dozens of examples of the revolving door.

The cost of all this in public policy terms, as well as in the integrity of the press, is difficult to overestimate. The MGM-Mirage deal was a once-in-an-era opportunity to examine the inner reality of a massively powerful business. Local papers might have dealt with crucial bread-and-butter issues of their rapidly growing city — what the deal held for labor where the notoriously anti-union MGM is now the state's largest employer, and where the worldwide gambling oligopoly is in even fewer hands.

Some in Las Vegas seem to understand that as the headquarters of an international empire, the city has become a kind of shadow capital of the nation, and that coverage of its enormous power is as much the responsibility of the local press as of any outside media. But reporting on a shadowy world capital is an imposing task for a journalism become cautious, if not compromised and captive. ■

Sally Denton and Roger Morris are the authors of The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America, *forthcoming in February.*

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Cynthia Joyce, Contributor, Salon.com

Adam Langer, Freelance writer and editor, *Book Magazine* and *Chicago Reader*

Naomi Person, Producer, "Fresh Air with Terry Gross," WHYY-FM (Philadelphia)

Ray Rinaldi, Arts and entertainment editor, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (MO)

THE AP NOW

You Can Count on It to Be Timely, Fair, and Accurate — But Is That Enough in the Internet World?

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

Whatever else Lou Boccardi is doing as head of the world's largest newsgathering organization, he reads the wire. Obsessively. He reads it on his computer at his New Rochelle home in the mornings before work. All day, an old-style wire printer buzzes and whines in a tiny closet in his corner office on the seventh floor of the Associated Press headquarters at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, spitting out the daily report. Whatever he hasn't read by the time he catches the evening train home — often a stack several inches thick — goes with him. He is not shy about calling the general desk from the commuter phone on the train with changes. It's as though each of the twenty million words the AP churns out daily must pass before Boccardi's careful eye. "I'm obliged to look at what we do," he says. "To not do that would be like a newspaper publisher who never reads his own paper."

For fifteen years, Louis D. Boccardi, sixty-three, has been the equivalent of a publisher — the president and c.e.o. of the AP. And for all those years he has held tight to the AP's unique and ambitious mission — to cover the world thoroughly and yardstick straight — in a media world that has changed tremendously. It took, for instance, just six seconds for the AP to get all 130,000 words of the Starr Report to members in 1998. To move that many words when Watergate broke would have taken more than thirty hours. Through all the change, though, Boccardi's AP has remained competitive and the dependable backbone of the news business. "Thirty years ago, when a story showed up with an AP byline, you knew you could accept it as true, that it would be fair," he says. "In the midst of all this change, it is important that we talk about that. The core beliefs. The AP standards. We are different in many ways, but I don't think that has changed."

But the AP's position in the media world is more complicated as the twentieth century gives way to the twenty-first. And being first, being accurate, and being fair — while still crucial — may no longer be enough.

Consider some of the ways that the media landscape has shifted in just the last two decades, creating a slew of new competitors and diminishing some of the things that made the AP unique. UPI, the AP's longtime rival, faded as Reuters went public and raised its U.S.

AMERICA'S NEWS BACKBONE

The Associated Press was founded in 1848 as a cooperative by six New York newspaper publishers looking to share costs with the arrival of a new technology — the telegraph.

One hundred fifty-two years later it is still a not-for-profit cooperative, owned by its newspaper members, who now total 1,550, all but thirty-two of the U.S. dailies. Most radio and television stations are associate members; they subscribe, but do not have voting rights.

The membership meets once a year, primarily to vote for the governing board of directors and hear a report on the last year's activities. Directors (now twenty-two) meet three times a year and mostly represent large media groups, but include at least three members from cities of under 50,000 population.

The AP is the backbone of the U.S. newsgathering system, with bureaus in every state and every statehouse. Members are required to provide copies of their breaking news stories to the AP.

Here is a look at the AP by the numbers:

Total bureaus: 241
U.S. 146, International 95

Total employees: 3,700
Total editorial staff: 2,700

Newspaper members: 1,550 (another 150 college, weekly, and non-English language papers subscribe but are not members)

U.S. TV and radio subscribers: 5,000

International news/photo subscribers: 8,500
International TV subscribers: 330

Annual budget: $570 million

Words processed daily: 20 million

Photos processed daily: 1,000



AP WIDEWORLD/DOUG MILLS

Lou Boccardi: 'It is important that we talk about our core beliefs'

profile. Bloomberg emerged to cover the booming financial news niche, and now is exploring the possibility of a general news service. Newspaper groups evolved into profit-driven media companies whose interests occasionally conflict with the AP's. Supplemental wires blossomed to compete with the AP for space in the daily newspapers. Nonstop cable news, led by CNN, eroded the breaking-news franchise of newspapers. And breaking news itself — the AP's core business — is becoming generic. "Wallpaper" is how Bill Keller, the managing editor of *The New York Times*, describes it. People consume news all day on TV, radio, countless Web sites, Palm Pilots, cell phones, even on tiny screens in elevators. Scoops, such as they are, are quickly matched and the story moves on.

"Our competition is niche by niche," says Jon Wolman, the AP's new executive editor. "We've never had more or stronger competition."

Now, the Internet creates a challenge unlike any the AP has faced. It is broad, ubiquitous, deep, and interactive. Anyone with a computer and a phone line can play. It changes how newspapers think of their audiences, and thus their competitors. "We see hits on our Web site from all over the country and the world," says Reid MacCluggage, publisher of *The Day* in New London, Connecticut. "We build submarines here. We are a pharmaceutical center. We have Indian reservations with casinos. People are interested in these things."

The Internet also diminishes the AP's traditional advantage in the distribution of news. *Capitolwire.com*, a year-old wire service out of Pennsylvania, is testing the marketplace with a chunk of venture capital, a few seasoned reporters, and the Internet (See page 59). Not long ago, the AP and Reuters were essentially the only ones who could get a photo from New



Boccardi (circled), outside AP building in New York, joins in celebrating Terry Anderson's release

AP/WIDE WORLD

BOCCARDI: ALWAYS WATCHING

In 1985, Lou Boccardi met with Terry Anderson in Cairo the weekend before Anderson was kidnapped by Islamic militants in Beirut. They discussed the potential danger Anderson was in. "Terry said to me, 'They [militants] know me and they know the AP. They would never cut us out,' " Boccardi recalls. "I had been president two-and-a-half months at that point, and I yielded."

It is a decision that still haunts Boccardi, nine years after Anderson was released. "I am responsible for the safety of everyone in this company," he says. "I don't compare what I went through to the horror Terry endured, but it never left me. Walking to the train in the evening, I thought about what we were doing for him. In the supermarket on weekends. It never left me."

If the AP is like no other media company, then Boccardi is like no other c.e.o. Patriarch may be a more fitting title. Born in the Bronx, he got his start as a reporter for the *New York World Telegram & Sun* in 1959. By 1966 he was an assistant managing editor at the *New York World Journal Tribune*. A year later he joined the AP in New York, quickly rising to managing editor in 1969. In 1973, he got the executive editor job, which he kept until 1985, when he became president and c.e.o. And for the past fifteen years he has watched, and worried, over his scattered AP flock, carefully monitoring its every move, doling out criticism and praise as needed. "In my tenure there, I never felt like Lou wasn't watching," says David Beard, a former AP reporter and editor who now is deputy foreign editor at *The Boston Globe*. "He has a presence."

That presence takes many forms. Like any patriarch, Boccardi has infuriated some, amazed others. But he generally gets credit for holding the unwieldy AP cooperative together through a time of enormous change. "If there was a problem, Lou wanted all the information," says Doug Willis, who retired this year after thirty-one years in the Sacramento bureau. "You got a quick interrogation and then you got a decision. Maybe I didn't always love the decision, but I appreciated that it was made."

Boccardi has been described variously as brilliant, scary, shrewd, grim, visionary, cold, charming, rigorous, and decisive. From that string of disparate adjectives, it is "cold" that gives Boccardi pause. "Without admitting to being decisive, brilliant, and charming," he says, "cold stops me a bit. I can't apply it. But I've been in a visible place in this company since walking through the door. Other people are going to have to make these assessments." And nearly everyone who has worked with Boccardi has one. "Lou is a tough boss," says Anderson, who is now the director of the Institute for International Journalism at Ohio University. "He is a brilliant man, but a tough man to work for. He wants the best out of you, and if you don't give it to him he will let you know. He can be very intimidating. He won't tolerate any bullshit."

Boccardi's attention to detail is legendary. He not only reads the wire each day, he edits it. Some call it micromanaging, others an invaluable backstop against errors. His catches make their way to the offending party, often in one of his infamous blue-enveloped missives. Evans Witt, who left the AP in 1995 after twenty-two years, had a habit of dropping courtesy titles from AP stories. "I got notes from Lou all the time," says Witt, now president of Princeton Survey Research Group. "He would write something like, 'When you're executive editor of the AP, you can drop courtesy titles. But you're not, so don't.' "

He is an editor turned c.e.o. who never stopped editing.

"I am relentless about some things," Boccardi says. "I make funny noises when I see things on the wire that shouldn't be there. I am obsessive about some things. If you are in the job I'm in, people need to perceive that you have a vision for the company, that you have standards. You have to play the game with the sense that they put you in charge for a reason."

As media titans go, Boccardi is no Rupert Murdoch. He takes the train to and from work. His office, with its wrap-around desk and row of chairs lined up before it, is more functional than opulent. It's as if Boccardi embodies the AP's low profile in media-obsessed New York. Boccardi declined to discuss the idea that the AP is often taken for granted by the members who rely on it. But his assistant, Kelly Smith Tunney, says, "You don't come to the AP to get your name in lights in your hometown paper every night."

Now, at age sixty-three, Boccardi is looking to the future. And in typical no-nonsense style, he won't talk legacy. "I'm not looking backward at a legacy because I'm not finished," he says. "I'm still building a business."

— Brent Cunningham

York to London instantly. Today, anyone with a laptop can do it.

But perhaps the biggest problem for the AP is that the Internet magnifies an inherent weakness in the wire service's cooperative structure. The AP must serve the needs of the more than 1,500 newspapers that own it, from *The New York Times* to the *Daily Guide* in Waynesville, Missouri. And often they need very different things. The Internet exacerbates this situation in a couple of ways. First, the newspaper industry is still trying to tame the Web. So the AP must find ways to help members develop their online operations, even when the members aren't sure exactly what they want. "If you asked ten members where they want their papers to be in five years, you'd hear a lot of confusion," says Wolman. "We hear that confusion, too. It's a very tumultuous period." Second, the Internet is as much an economic force as a journalistic one. The AP must develop its business in cyberspace without competing with its members who are also trying to establish a presence there.

For example, the AP's Web site, the WIRE, may never be the kind of dynamic portal site it could be given the AP's reach and resources. Why? Because members don't want it to be. They don't want their readers bypassing their own sites to get news from the AP. Currently, the WIRE gets about 600,000 unique visitors a month compared to 7.3 million for CNN. You can't get to the AP site without going through a member's site, but only 450 newspapers — out of 1,200 with Web sites — currently subscribe to the WIRE. In part, this is because papers want to build their own sites into regional or national portals. They want to use AP stories to help do this, but they don't want to lose readers to the wire. "If four years ago we had been able to take off with our Web site," says Ruth Gersh, editorial director of AP Digital, "would we be as big as CNN today? Probably, but that's not what the AP does."

No one is writing the AP's obit. News organizations still depend on it to varying degrees to fill their columns with stories, photos, and stock tables. With 241 bureaus around the world, the AP has more than twice as many as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* combined, and fifty-six more than Reuters. And with bureaus in every state, it still has a lock on the all-important state and local news. "No newspaper can survive without the AP," says Robert Port, a former editor of the AP's investigative team. "No matter how many Web sites you create, to bang out the news you've got to be where it's happening, and no one else is."

But the challenges the AP faces are real and they are formidable — on the Internet, in the newsroom, and in its cooperative structure.

"It is a very difficult choice they have to make," says Mark Weinberg, a former managing editor of Knight Ridder's Internet operation. "Are they going to distribute news as widely as possible on the Internet, or restrict themselves to member services and supporting member efforts? Are they going to try to be in the business themselves, with an ad-driven product, or not? It will take someone with guts to make those calls."



AP WIDEWORLD

Jon Wolman: "It's a very tumultuous period."

Boccardi has been making such calls at the AP since 1985. He says he has no plans to retire, and AP bylaws don't require him to. But the AP board has discussed the issue of his successor. "Without going into specifics, the executive committee is constantly aware of and considering the future," says Donald Newhouse, chairman of the AP board. And while Wolman is widely considered the heir apparent, no decision has been made and no executive at the AP will talk about it. Regardless, whoever eventually

THE AP'S CHANGING MENU

The AP's franchise is its news service, which offers subscribers six options, ranging from 1,500 stories a day to 20 stories a day. Members are charged based on circulation and service level, with annual bills ranging from several thousand to more than $1 million. But as the world has changed, so has the AP's menu. Following are some of its recent innovations:

AP LEAF PICTURE DESK (1990): This digitized photo delivery system revolutionized the news photo business, eliminating the need for prints by dropping pictures directly into member computers. Now, it's being replaced by **AP Server**, a powerful new receiver that streamlines transmission and delivers graphics and AdSEND, as well as photos.

AP GRAPHICSBANK (1991): Online archive of TV graphics has more than 100,000 images.

ADSEND (1994): Uses spare capacity on the AP's satellite delivery system to allow advertisers to create ads digitally, push a button and send the ad to publications all over the world. More than 800 advertisers send 1.5 million ads a year via AdSEND.

AP TELEVISION NEWS (1994): International broadcast arm of the AP. Became a major player when AP bought Worldwide Television News in 1998. Sells mostly raw footage with natural sound and scripts to virtually every major broadcaster in the world, as well as government and corporate customers. Gave AP an all-important video component in time for the Internet explosion.

AP ALL NEWS RADIO (1994): A 24-hour-a-day packaged radio newscast that made the all-news format available to stations in any market.

THE WIRE (1996): AP's Web site. A continuously updated online multimedia news service.

AP DIGITAL (2000): Sells AP content commercially to nonmember Internet customers. It is the fastest-growing part of the AP's revenue stream.

replaces Boccardi will be leading a different AP through a different world.

CULTURE OF CAUTION

In many ways, the AP's cooperative structure has served it well. For example, the AP gets the expertise of a board of directors that includes the leaders of the major newspaper and broadcast operations. Also, as the newspaper industry went public and felt the pressure from Wall Street, the AP remained free of the yoke of quarterly returns. The AP is not beholden to any one interest, and is therefore free, as Mark Fritz, a former Pulitzer Prize-winning AP writer, says, "to send me into Somalia with $10,000 taped to my ankles." Even so, the AP prides itself on its efficiency, both journalistically and financially. "They will spend whatever is necessary to get the story," says Terry Anderson, the former Middle East correspondent who was kidnapped and held in Lebanon for six years by Islamic militants. "But if you can make the company car last an extra year, you will win points with Lou."



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

Dean, School of Communication

American University has extended its national search for a Dean to lead its School of Communication. Nominations and applications will be accepted until the position is filled. The university, located in Washington, D.C., is a private institution chartered by Congress in 1893. Its strategic plan places a high priority on globalism and diversity. American University has approximately 11,000 students, evenly divided between graduate and undergraduate students. The student body comes from all 50 states and more than 140 nations around the world.

The School of Communication is one of six major academic units of the university, with an enrollment of approximately 800 undergraduate students and 400 graduate students. It has 40 full-time faculty members and 70 adjunct faculty drawn from Washington's professional communication community. The school awards bachelors and masters degrees in three disciplines: Journalism, Public Communication, and Visual Media. The school has a strong professional and public policy focus, as well as strong ties to the communications industry in Washington, offering students and faculty unique opportunities for scholarship and practical experience.

The Dean must be able to articulate a vision for the fast-changing field of communication education and must possess the stature and leadership to bring that vision to reality. It is expected that the Dean would have high-level professional experience in one or more of the school's three fields. Through educational or professional experience, the Dean should be familiar with the requirements for leading and managing in an academic environment.

The school is building programs that reflect the convergence with electronic communication technologies that are reshaping the media world. The new Dean must be a major force in shaping these programs and in the fund-raising efforts that will be essential to their implementation.

American University is an EEO/AA employer committed to a diverse student body, faculty, and staff. Minority and women candidates are encouraged to apply. Please forward nominations and applications (which should include a letter of interest and a resume or curriculum vitae) to: Prof. Rodger Streitmatter, Chair, Dean's Search Committee, School of Communication, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20016-8017.

This efficiency — or frugality — is reflected in the relatively low profile the AP keeps in media-driven New York. AP headquarters is in midtown Manhattan, near the *Today* show set and a brief walk from a cluster of major media outlets. But it would be just as much at home — maybe more so — in Manhattan, Kansas. "Look at who we are and what we do," says Wolman. "We are a cooperative of newspapers and broadcasters. We don't have an independent brand, to use today's buzzword. I don't say we're anonymous, but much of what we do is folded into someone else's product."

But the need to serve the many masters of a cooperative breeds a sort of caution that can affect the AP's journalism and its business operations. "There is this culture of caution at the AP," says Fred Bayles, who spent twenty years there before leaving in 1997 for *USA Today*. "We've all gone through some frustration with it, and it is at times taken to the extreme. But it is that way for a reason. If I do something wrong at my paper, it is bad for my paper. If I do something wrong for the AP, it is bad for 1,500 papers."

When the AP story on the massacre of civilians by U.S. troops at No Gun Ri in the early days of the Korean War won this year's Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, the wire service knocked a persistent monkey from its back. It was the AP's forty-sixth Pulitzer, but its first for investigative journalism. And despite some well-publicized problems with one of the sources, the story provided something of an antidote to the long-standing criticism that the AP isn't comfortable doing controversial investigative stories. The AP management, and many of its former writers, call this criticism unfair. The theory, though, is grounded in that "culture of caution" created by the cooperative: the AP is wary of upsetting members. Good investigative journalism leads to conclusions, a judgment of right and wrong. And, as Terry Anderson says, "The AP has not had an opinion in 150 years." In fact, investigative reporting isn't even called investigative at the AP. It's "hard-edge reporting." And whether fair or not, some of the most visible U.S. government and military scandals of the last thirty years — My Lai, Watergate, and Iran-Contra among them — have been followed by questions from inside and outside the AP about the wire service's unwillingness to lead on such stories. "Investigative reporting makes the AP very nervous,"

says Bob Egelko, who left the AP in June after thirty years when he was pulled from the federal court beat in San Francisco, allegedly for missing key testimony in the suit challenging Hearst Corporation's attempt to buy the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "It is no great accident that No Gun Ri was their first investigative Pulitzer. That is not how it has seen its role."

Mark Fritz says that wasn't his experience. He cites a story he did in 1995 on controversial newsprint contracts that major U.S. newspaper companies — *The New York Times* and Knight Ridder among them — had with a company that logged in an ancient Canadian rain forest. "I always felt you could do anything you wanted at the AP," he says.

Wolman acknowledges that the cooperative structure doesn't allow the "sharp attitude" that often goes with investigative reporting. "But we don't want sharp attitude," he says. "We want to produce a fair and balanced report in all areas, spot news or investigative."



Survivors and relatives mark the 50th anniversary of the massacre by American troops at No Gun Ri in July.

But whatever No Gun Ri did to change this perception of the AP, in some ways it only dragged the wire's struggle to broaden its journalistic mission into the spotlight. More than a year elapsed between the first draft in July 1998 and the version of No Gun Ri that went out on the wire in September 1999. During that time, the editor handling the story, Robert Port, was reassigned and eventually quit. Wolman, who had been elevated from D.C. bureau chief to managing editor in late 1998, was brought in to finish the job. In May of this year, he replaced Bill Ahearn, the executive editor who was abruptly fired for reasons that have never been publicly aired but involved issues of management style and effectiveness that clearly ran deeper than any disagreement over No Gun Ri. (Boccardi would not discuss Ahearn or his firing.) And there has been a running debate ever since the story moved about when it was ready, who supported it, and who did not. "No Gun Ri went to the wire when we were satisfied we had it cold," says Boccardi. "If we were afraid of the story, we could have pulled the plug at any point. We spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on that. Would I have allowed that if it was a story I fundamentally didn't want? There was a difference of opinion about when it was ready for the wire, but the AP's conscience is clear and my conscience is clear."

Ahearn created the investigative team and hired Port to run it. That team was dismantled after No Gun Ri, but Wolman says a new team is being assembled. Ahearn had been leading a charge to expand the AP's enterprise and investigative work, and embolden its writing at the bureau level. In addition to Port, he hired a writing coach, a computer-assisted-reporting specialist, and someone to turn the AP library into a state-of-the-art research center. "Bill understood in a conceptual way exactly what the AP needs to do to survive as a news organization," says Port, who now works on the investigative team at the New York *Daily News*. "I'm talking editorially, not financially or technologically. He wanted more enterprise, more aggressive reporting in the bureaus."

Whatever his differences with Ahearn, Boccardi agrees that the AP must evolve journalistically. Today, he says, the AP must "write with authority." It must do the big stories on things like child labor and guardianship laws and No Gun Ri. "Without those stories, our value diminishes in the climate our members have to compete in," he says. The AP needs to do more enterprise and investigative work because newspapers demand it. Because the supplemental wires — against which the AP competes — provide it. And because the job market for journalists is strong. An AP reporter stuck doing write-throughs and covering too many legislative committee meetings is more likely to be enticed away with the promise of more money and greater editorial freedom.

Comparatively low pay in major urban markets — coupled with the exacting pace and relative anonymity of wire-service life — has long been a reason for talent to leave the AP. In most places, AP salaries stack up well. But in large cities, AP reporter salaries generally lag behind their newspaper counterparts. Wolman says people don't leave the AP over money, that there are always other factors involved. But low pay was cited as an issue in a number of interviews for this story with former AP reporters and editors. "They have a massive salary problem," says Rick Hampson, who spent twenty-one years with the AP before bolting in 1997 for *USA Today*. The AP's company-wide turnover rate is 12 percent. Turnover at individual bureaus is not tracked, according to Janis Magin, a corporate spokeswoman.

Under the new contract AP negotiated with the Wire Service Guild, base pay for an AP reporter in New York or D.C. with six years of experience is $55,000. At *Newsday*, a reporter with that much experience could start at $78,000. At *The Boston Globe*, the minimum salary would be $65,000. The dot-com explosion and booming economy have only exacerbated this problem. Things got bad enough that in August the AP began offering a finder's fee of up to $2,000 to any employee who brings in someone who is hired and stays at least six months.

The AP has always had good writers. But it isn't enough anymore to just have a Poet's Corner — as the old stable of AP feature writers was called — or a handful of stars who can drop into the day's big story and work their magic. The

AP WIDE WORLD/ AHN YOUNG-JOON

challenge now for the AP is to extend that good writing, that enterprise and investigative reporting, to every bureau. But it must do it without slipping even a bit on its spot news coverage. Because if AP members want the beautifully written enterprise piece, they want it after they get all the day's spot news. "We train more than we ever did, we provide time to do those stories," says Boccardi. "But never for a minute do we move away from spot news. We try to do both. I can't use the word schizophrenia, but we try to do both." The latest round of member surveys, finished last year, reminded AP management just how important that is. "If fresh spot news is their top priority," says Wolman, "then stories with context and authority are next. I mean right next."

Doing both requires more people, and the AP has added staff — fifty editorial employees in the last three years, mostly in bureaus other than New York and D.C. But there is still a way to go. "You don't have to look far to find people in the bureaus who say they are undermanned," Boccardi says. "We've added staff where we can, in a rational way, and we're not finished. I don't know what's enough when you're trying to do everything."

The effort has paid off in some bureaus. Bill Baskervill, a reporter in the Richmond bureau, which has a dozen editorial employees, has done solid investigative stories in recent years on things like the lack of sprinklers in college dorms and conditions in state mental hospitals. In 1998, he won the Gramling Award, AP's highest reporting honor. "I suppose I'm fortunate because my boss gives me free reign," says Baskervill, who has spent all thirty-two of his years at the AP in Richmond. "I get at least four days a week of enterprise time."

The reality, though, for many AP reporters is that there still isn't time for both. "The entire time I was at the AP, that was a struggle," says Jim Strader, who left the AP in May after ten years, most of them in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, bureau, to work for *capitolwire.com*. "The AP wanted page-one stories in every paper, but the reality is that the demands placed on you by members — 'Can you cover this?' 'We need you to cover that' — and the demands from the news editors who need to keep the wire full of news, leave you little time to do those bigger stories." Strader said a big project on Pennsylvania's elderly languished on the bureau's planning book for two years, and was still undone when he left, because no one had the time.

It may be that no matter how many people it adds, the AP can never completely escape this problem of having to be all things to all members. "We have always had, and will continue to have, enormous conflicts over how we use manpower," says Doug Willis, who retired from AP's Sacramento bureau this year after thirty-one years with the wire. "Because we have members with vastly different needs." For example, the AP has seven editorial employees in its Sacramento bureau. The *Los Angeles Times* has eleven. "They want us to do the things they don't want to bother with," Willis says of the *Times*. "Same with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the San Diego paper, and a few others. Then we serve a lot of papers with 25,000, even 100,000 circulation who have one person or no one in Sacramento. They

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rely on us for everything. So that tension will always be there."

AN AP IPO?

Boccardi says the benefits of the cooperative "far outweigh" any negatives. But not everyone agrees that the cooperative structure is the best business model for the new era. "You've got to be willing to take risks in this new environment," says Charles Brumback, former chairman of Tribune Company. "The AP is a risk avoider. All cooperatives are risk avoiders."

There are those in the media business, including former AP insiders, who, like Brumback, think the AP should restructure, become a for-profit operation in total or in part. Maybe spin off its online operation. The idea of spinning off part of the AP has been discussed by management, but there is currently no serious consideration of structural change, according to both Boccardi and Patrick O'Brien, the AP's chief financial officer. Advocates of a for-profit AP say it would make it easier for it to develop as a cutting-edge newsgathering and distribution business. A for-profit AP could raise more money, it wouldn't have to measure everything against its members, and it would be subject to the discipline that comes with operating in the public realm. "Their performance would be visible to everyone," says Brumback. "As it is, there isn't any urgency in an organization like that to excel."

O'Brien acknowledges that the AP cannot raise hundreds of millions of dollars simply by selling stock, the way it could if it were for-profit. But he says there is presently no need for the AP to raise that kind of money, and it has no trouble borrowing what it does need. "They [banks] know the AP is an institution, that it is not going to go out of business," he says. "There is a willingness to lend us what we need." To start APTN, its video service, for example, the AP borrowed about $50 million, easily its largest investment. O'Brien says he can't rule out the possibility that they would spin off part of the AP in the future. It would allow the AP to offer its employees stock options, for instance, which could help the wire service reduce turnover. "If we ever need to raise hundreds of millions of dollars," O'Brien says, "the best way to do it — maybe the only way to do it — would be to spin part of the company off. But we've carefully considered these things and decided we don't need, nor do we want, to do it now."

And indeed there would be tradeoffs if the AP became a for-profit operation. "I'm an editor in the hinterland," says David Hawpe, editorial director of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, "and if I call Lou Boccardi there is absolutely no question that I will get him on the phone. It doesn't mean he will do what I want, but I get the chance to make my case. If the AP were public, it would be much more difficult to feel a part of it. I call Lou as a member, not as a supplicant."

Another thing that has happened in the last twenty years to complicate the AP's cooperative structure is the increasing consolidation of ownership. As media companies grow larger and more diverse, areas of tension can develop between their strategic interests and the AP's strategic interests. Representatives of these companies still sit on the AP board, and have a say in AP policy. "We sell news, too, through our news service affiliates," says Jack Fuller, president of the Tribune Company's publishing operation. "That's a tension." Consider this possible scenario: The *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post* already have a news service. So do Knight Ridder and the Tribune Company Now that Tribune owns the *L.A. Times*, why couldn't these

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THE AP NOW

four media heavyweights form a joint service? It still wouldn't have the reach of the AP, but it would be a major force both nationally and internationally. "The big papers could start an alternative wire service if they wanted to," says Mark Fritz, who now works for the *L.A. Times*. "You could almost say it is already happening."

Even if such a joint venture took off, it wouldn't be aimed at replacing what the AP does on a day-to-day basis. And it still wouldn't challenge AP dominance at the state level, which is in many ways the wire's most important asset. Bill Keller, of *The New York Times*, says the distinction between newspaper wire services, newspaper Web sites, and the AP is becoming less stark. For example, the *Times*'s news service originally was designed to provide its subscribers with stories that would run in the next day's newspaper a little early. Now it is cranking out copy nearly around the clock to feed its subscribers' growing online operations. Still, Keller says, the difference is real. "We don't want to replicate what the AP does," he says. "We are not going to want to chase every plane crash or every third-level coup."

WEB WOES

Fifteen years ago, the AP was selling stories to Internet pioneers like CompuServe and Prodigy, and no one cared. By the early 1990s, however, the newspaper industry awoke to the reality that something called the World Wide Web was after its precious classified ad revenue. The simultaneous rise of the Internet as both economic engine and journalistic player has created something of a Catch-22 for the AP. With UPI gone, the AP now serves nearly every newspaper in the country and most broadcast outlets. There is no more room for growth in these traditional markets. The things AP is doing journalistically cost money. And because it has promised to keep member dues as low as possible, the AP must find other ways to subsidize its journalism. "Newspapers are not going to pay the costs of all the things they are doing," says Frank Daniels, a former chairman of the AP board of directors. "And they will start to lose some of the smaller members if the price gets too high." If that happens, Daniels notes, the AP loses its all-important blanket coverage.

This need to develop so-called nontraditional revenue streams has been true at the AP for at least the last twenty years. And under Boccardi, the wire service has been adept at finding slices of its vast operation to sell to members and nonmembers alike. AdSEND, for example, uses spare capacity in the AP's satellite transmission system to allow advertisers to create a digital ad and send it to multiple papers with the push of a button. Projected AP revenue for 2000 is $600 million. About a quarter is expected to come from nontraditional sources. Meanwhile, the percentage of revenue from member dues continues to drop. Newspapers accounted for 45 percent of AP revenue in 1990. Last year, that had fallen to 32 percent. In the same period, broadcast services fell from 20 percent to 15 percent of revenue. The AP is increasingly making its money outside its traditional markets. Today, that means cyberspace. And that puts it on a collision course with some of its largest members who are also competing for eyeballs and advertising with the AOLs and the Yahoos — precisely the market AP must tap if it is to make enough money to keep from raising member dues.

"This has been an enormous struggle for them," says Terry Anderson. "They did torturous, torturous studies to figure out how the AP can be an Internet presence without competing with its members."

Consider the current unrest among members over the wire service's sale of content to nonmember sites like AOL and Yahoo. *The Washington Post*, for example, is investing heavily in its Web site in an effort to both give the paper more of a national presence and establish *washingtonpost.com* as a portal site for news and information. "This is potentially a strategic crossroads for the AP," says Steve Coll, the *Post*'s managing editor. "Right now, the AP is selling its wire — which is produced in part from the resources of its owners — to portal sites that are competing with its owners."

Tom Slaughter, who runs AP Digital, the new arm set up this year to consolidate sales of AP content to nonmember Internet customers, acknowledges Coll's criticism. But he says the AP board of directors — which is elected to speak for the mem-

ONLINE SERVICE LOOKS FOR NICHE IN STATE NEWS



Peter Shelly

Back in January 1999, Peter Shelly would rise at 4 A.M., sit at his kitchen table with his laptop in his Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, home, and summarize government stories from papers around the state. He wrote headlines on his own Web site with links to the full stories.

Three hours later, he was off to his real job, as a statehouse reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

What began as an experiment has grown into an online news and information service — focused on state government and politics — with 2,000 paying subscribers. The year-old *capitolwire.com* illustrates how the Internet has leveled the technological playing field. It has statehouse bureaus in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Virginia, as well as a correspondent at city hall in New York City, and plans to eventually cover all fifty states.

The service is sold by subscription to newspapers, government agencies, law firms, and lobbyists. So far, the only newspaper subscribers are *The Harrisburg Patriot-News*, the *York Daily Record*, and a chain of weeklies owned by Chesapeake Publishing — all in Pennsylvania. Monthly fees for newspapers run $150 to $3,000, depending on circulation and use.

Capitolwire has a staff of thirty-eight, including a core of seasoned reporters and someone whose only job is to sell *capitolwire* to newspapers. On staff are former reporters from The Associated Press, *Newsday*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. WaterView Partners, a New York-based venture capital firm, agreed to put up several million dollars, and MacMillan Communications, a New York public relations outfit, signed on to promote *capitolwire*.

In addition to links to more than 300 news sites around the country, *capitolwire* provides original news and enterprise stories. It also archives all manner of state government documents — from press releases and contracts to the full text of legislation — from the states where *capitolwire* has bureaus.

"I just saw all this information in the capitol that wasn't getting out of the building," says Shelly, a thirty-eight-year-old father of three who quit his newspaper job for a shot at Internet entrepreneurship.

Through *capitolwire*, newspapers can quickly access information for trend stories and analyses that a few years ago would have required hours of sifting through files. For example, a reporter writing about a bill under consideration can check the status of similar legislation in other states. News and information can be customized to client interest, and everything is archived by topic in *capitolwire*'s searchable database.

"Its greatest value is one-stop shopping for research," says Dennis Hetzel, editor and publisher of the *York Daily Record*. — *John Baer*

Baer is a reporter and columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News.

bership — supports the mission of AP Digital. "The reality for us," Slaughter says, "is that we serve a market that is fundamentally mature. So if we are going to improve the level of services to our owners we must find ways to fund it, and the area that is growing the fastest in terms of revenue is that served by AP Digital."

In the broadest sense, though, the AP's two missions appear to be in conflict. "It is a cooperative that must serve its members," says Howard Schneider, managing editor at *Newsday*. "But it also must become a viable business in the new, digital media world. That is a crucial question for the AP. Will it remain primarily a service for newspapers, or become a multimedia service for anyone who wants it?"

Sounds like the AP has already made that decision. "We are an information wholesaler," says Slaughter. "We want to be in as many venues and as many markets as possible." Slaughter wouldn't say how many customers AP Digital has,

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- Moji Makanjuola, health correspondent, Nigeria Television Authority
- Marilynn Marchione, medical reporter, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
- Eric Whitney, freelance radio producer, Santa Fe, New Mexico

only that he expects it to be double by the end of the year what it was in January. Reuters — which moved aggressively into Internet sales in the mid-1990s, unencumbered by the politics of a cooperative — sells content to 900 Web sites. Slaughter says if you combine AP Digital clients with member Web sites that use AP copy, the AP has "at least that many" online customers.

Slaughter — and everyone else at the AP — is quick to note that the wire service sells only its national and international reports to nonmember customers. The state wire — where the majority of member-generated stories run — is not for sale and probably won't be any time soon. Still, there is a concern among some AP members that as AP stories become increasingly available in free, nonmember venues, the value of the wire service will change. Part of the AP's value to large papers and broadcast outlets, for example, is as a tip sheet. They learn from AP's comprehensive spot news coverage where to send their own reporters to do in-depth pieces, trend stories, and analyses. "This is far from their only value to us, and I am not prepared to say there will come a time when we don't need the AP anymore," says Bill Keller. "But I can certainly say I can foresee when their value to us would diminish because this information is available online for free. And our contract negotiations with them would get very interesting at that point."

And it isn't only the large papers that are troubled by this. "I do see some potential problems there," says Janet Weaver, executive editor of the 110,000-circulation *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. "The Web is an area we have moved into very aggressively."

Wolman acknowledges that the Internet has the potential to change the AP's value to its traditional customers, but plays down the significance of this particular cyber skirmish. "The ubiquitousness of news on the Internet should not in any way diminish our value to *The New York Times*," he says. "Does that mean that the Internet will never change our value in any respect? No. But I don't know how. I don't take anything for granted in this new environment, but nobody knows how all this is going to evolve."

Despite these "bumps," as Boccardi calls them, the AP is adapting. By some measures, the AP is ideally suited to this new world. The AP, they are fond of saying at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, was the original Internet. Demand for fast, well-written, well-edited news that is reliable and updated around the clock — essentially what the AP has been doing for 152 years — has never been higher. And over the last couple of years, the AP has found more creative ways to help its members online. For example, it has:

- Replaced its a.m.-p.m. news cycle with a twenty-four-hour cycle that reflects the non-stop nature of the Internet.
- Added a navigation model on its Web

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site that puts links at the bottom of stories to allow members to access deeper levels of information if they want.

■ Begun posting major projects — like No Gun Ri and a series on the spread of the English language around the world — on its Web site.

■ Developed specialized tool sites — one last year on Y2K and another this year on politics — that give members access to databases, links, and other information they can use in their own reporting.

"We are building a family of services for the Internet that is separate from the newspaper wire," says Wick Temple, the AP's head of member services. For example, the AP is currently testing a version of its state news report for online use, and expects to have it available in every state by the end of the year.

The AP is also adding staff to do niche-oriented news in areas that member surveys have indicated are in demand — business, technology, sports, entertainment, health, and science. Since last year, it has added an entertainment editor, a celebrity editor, six writers, and a photo editor to its print and online staffs devoted to entertainment news.

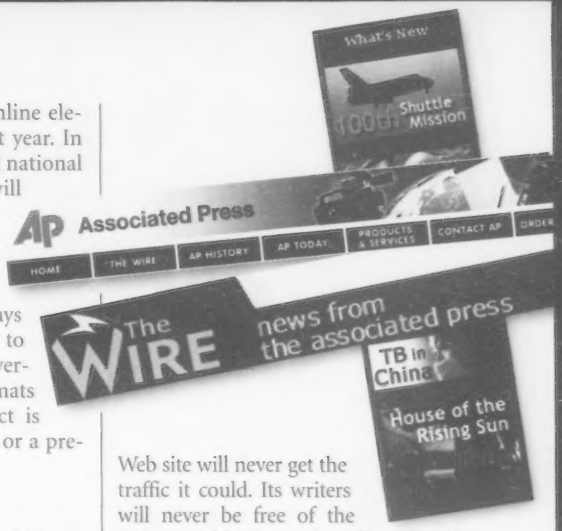
A major census-related project — with print, broadcast, and online elements — is planned for next year. In addition to the AP's state and national stories, for a fee members will be able to get intensely local data online that they can use in their own stories.

"If the AP is going to be successful in the future," says Wolman, "it is going to have to create a different type of coverage in which all these formats converge. This census project is either a really great example, or a premature one."

SACRIFICE

In interview after interview for this story, people used military metaphors and a notion of sacrifice to describe life at the AP. Always there, in the trenches, toiling anonymously to inform the world. "People who have served in the Marines, or had a Jesuit education, would thrive in the AP," says David Beard, a former AP editor who is now deputy foreign editor at *The Boston Globe*. "You must understand the idea of sacrifice."

As long as the AP remains a member-owned cooperative, it will continue to sacrifice for the sake of its members. Its



Web site will never get the traffic it could. Its writers will never be free of the 150-year-old assumption, "Let the wire cover it." And no matter how much good writing and in-depth reporting it produces, it will never completely escape the fact that its owners don't want it to outshine their own reporters. That is who the AP is. The Internet doesn't change that, it only complicates the situation. Somehow, the Associated Press must find its way in this new world without abandoning its unique and unsung role. ■

Brent Cunningham is CJR*'s associate editor.*

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KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

'You Just Signed His Death Warrant': AIDS Politics and the Journalist's Role



BY LAURIE GARRETT

Laurie Garrett is a Pulitzer Prize-winning medical and science writer for *Newsday* and author of the 1995 bestseller *The Coming Plague*. Her new book, *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*, has just been published.

This article is adapted from a speech delivered by Laurie Garrett at the XIII International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, on July 13, 2000.

In the early eighteenth century, Daniel Defoe penned a brilliant account of the 1665 Great Plague of London: *The Journal of the Plague Year*. There was just one catch — Defoe was five years old when it happened and he wasn't ever there. Much of his account was based on renditions from a surviving uncle, as well as official records kept by London authorities during the epidemic.

We actually have few accounts of any of the great plagues of the past. We know they occurred; we know they took a terrible toll. We know that between 1346 and 1351 Yersinia pestis claimed a quarter to a third of the population of Europe and Central Asia. But we know few details.

There were no journalists. Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron*, a collection of stories set against Florence's fourteenth century Black Death. But that's not journalism. Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, six centuries after that plague, gives a better rendition of those events. But even she was doing a lot of guesswork.

Still, from her we learned that societies were so overwhelmed by the impact that entire cultures were obliterated or turned upside down, that the Catholic Church's power was eroded, that the aristocracy came under threat for the first time, and that ultimately the Renaissance was ushered in. That was then, this is now.

Today, we can bring you death, live on TV from sub-Saharan Africa. In the comfort of your home, you can watch the plague. In Los Angeles, Paris, or Tokyo sipping Chablis while saying, "tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk," you can watch the sad images of AIDS orphans and dying families in Zimbabwe or Congo, where the real suffering is going on. From the comfort of your Western home, you can relate to it just about as emotionally deeply as you can to Barbara Tuchman's book about the plague of the fourteenth century.

Larry Gostin, of Georgetown University, who has been in this game from the very beginning, has a term for this. He calls it Death Voyeurism. We of the Northern Hemisphere watch while the South suffers, and the media provide the bridge, displaying it in the living rooms of the North.

In 1988 Jonathan Mann organized the first meeting that tried to examine the possibility of having a prevention effort for AIDS. It took place in Ixtapa, Mexico. I addressed that meeting on the subject journalists are typically asked to talk about: the media and AIDS. And I thought at the time that it was appropriate to say that it was our job to tell stories, and show the face of the epidemic. Our job was to take the reader, or the listener or viewer, into the epidemic, and display the despair.

I was already wrong.

As I spoke I did something I naively thought was absolutely terrific. I took my hat off to a colleague from Kenya, and I mentioned him by name, describing him as a bold and courageous, independent journalist working outside the government broadcasting system to bring information about AIDS to the Kenyan people at a time when virtually nobody said the word AIDS.

As soon as I stepped off the podium a Kenyan scientist approached me and said, "You just signed his death warrant." And, indeed, the journalist I had praised was arrested later that afternoon in Nairobi. For the next days, Jonathan Mann and I did everything we could to gain his release and fortunately we were successful.

And I grew up.

I think it's high time that the entire international media and press corps grow up. It's high time all of us, North and South, stop simply saying, "It's sad. It's pathetic. The numbers are huge. It's getting worse. Oh my gosh!"

We must take our jobs far more seriously than that. We must in real time do what Defoe did retrospectively about the Black Death. We have to name corrupt names, we have to demand accountability. We have to demand the truth.

Those of you who are in science and public health here in this room, and who just applauded what I said, often speak of "using the media" to get out your message. You are fools. Pardon me, but nobody "uses" journalists. Except, of course, corrupt officials, dictators, and other ne'er-do-wells. If the media are behaving properly, they are skeptical of each and every one of you in this room, every single day, and demand the truth of you. How are you spending those donated funds? What programs are you implementing with them? Are you letting your egos and your careers get in the way of doing what is best for this epidemic? Are you Northern Hemisphere scientists working in a sensitive and productive manner with Southern Hemisphere scientists?

Government officials — if the media are doing their job, they are

MARK GREENBERG/VISIONS

a thorn in your side every damned day. We are asking — indeed, demanding — to know how taxpayer dollars are being spent, if good science is coming out of your laboratories, and if the national leadership is doing everything it could and should do.

And for you in the private sector — this meeting is, by the way, sponsored by a drug company — whether you are a pharmaceutical manufacturer, the medical industry, an insurance company, a bank, or whatever, again, journalism is going to scrutinize you whether you like it or not. That is, if it's good journalism. It will inquire whether your medicines are as effective and safe as you claim, and demand to know why they are priced so high as to be completely unaffordable for those here in Africa who desperately need them.

You should all appreciate this scrutiny, as an asset in the overall future of our fight against this epidemic.

But first, there are some limitations on the media side. In the wealthy world most media organizations — newspapers, radio, online — have in the last few years been gobbled up by large corporations. It's very rare now in the wealthy world to run across family-owned, large media operations. And what that means is that now our media bosses expect us to meet a bottom line, a certain profit margin, a given stock market flow. And in order to do so we have to be catchy, be there twenty-four hours a day, be there all of the time. Total access! We are there in your living room. And what suffers in the atmosphere of immediacy is analysis. What suffers in this search for speed is depth. The media in the wealthy world are becoming increasingly simplistic, superficial, and celebrity-focused.

In the developing world much of the media is government-owned or tightly controlled. So-called independent media in the developing world are often actually owned by local business magnates, even some with rather shady criminal relationships. The infrastructure of media in the Southern Hemisphere is generally pretty poor and it takes a lot of guts to be a reporter in most of the developing world.

I was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for my coverage of the Ebola epidemic in Kikwit, Zaire. And for years people came up to me and said, "Oh my goodness, you were so courageous! You were there for three weeks in an epidemic!"

That's not guts, folks, because at any moment I had a U.S. passport, a pile of cash, a ton of credit cards, and a home base that was practically on another planet, to which I could escape. Not so for my colleagues who are citizens of the developing countries.

War-related intimidation of the press is expanding in Africa at this moment primarily because the Congo conflict is widening. Currently seven countries or guerrilla groups have combat forces on the ground in the Congo, and probably an additional six are providing safe haven in their territory to guerrillas and combatants. At least another six are actively supplying arms. There's a tremendous threat that this conflict could spread, exploding across Africa. Fought, by the way, primarily over diamonds.

The implications of this for AIDS coverage are that in such an atmosphere it takes a great deal of courage to ask questions and demand answers. In June, I was in Zimbabwe inquiring about AIDS in a rural area just before the national elections. As I was doing so, a group of ZANU thugs threatened to kill me — simply because I was asking about government failures to stem the tide of HIV. Now, when such a threat comes down on me I have this white skin, an American passport, and the money to buy a plane ticket home. Ultimately, I had nothing to fear. I hightailed it out of town. Had I been a local reporter, I wouldn't have had that option.

The facts must be heard. A group of doctors working in East Africa recently published heartbreaking information in *Daedalus* describing the agony of being physicians who are utterly helpless before a plague — a sense of frustration, of cynicism, of emotional numbing, and a higher mistake rate in the practice of all forms of medicine. On the village level, Gabriel Rugalema has chronicled the complete eradication of the tribal clan structure, with the collapse of inheritance, social fabric, morals, and agricultural production. And he describes rising lawlessness as AIDS orphans reach their teenage and young adult years.

The questions must be asked. Most important: What is the strategy? How can we slow this plague in the absence of a vaccine or cure? I know of no more important question for journalists to be asking at this moment. After all, there is no other force on Earth — no wars, no famines, no genocides — that is killing as many millions of people today as is this damnable microbe.

If there had been a journalist covering the fourteenth century plague, one of the questions I hope would have been asked is, "How exactly does burning another Jew at the stake stop this plague?"

Defoe told us of the corruption of London during the plague. Of doctors gouging patients with quack remedies, even fatal ones. And of the aristocracy that fled to the countryside and abandoned the poor of London. Even though he was a generation after the fact, Defoe still pointed his finger at the rich, the heartless, and the cruel.

The press and the media have, I would say, a duty to reveal those sorts of trends now, in real time, in our modern plague. Leaders must be held accountable. Corruption must be exposed. Ineptitude and careerism must be fingered. And where it exists, success must be underscored and then followed by the question, "If it works here, why not over there?"

"Let us not equivocate," Nelson Mandela said. "AIDS today in Africa is claiming more lives than the sum total of all wars, famines, and floods, and the ravages of such deadly diseases as malaria. It is devastating families and communities."

And in press parlance, that's a big story. ■

Number One Issue in the World

Richard Holbrooke, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, put the global AIDS epidemic in perspective in a television interview last summer:

AIDS is the number one issue in the world today, the number one issue. The level of the AIDS crisis, its potential to destroy economic achievement, undermine social stability, and create more political uncertainty, and the inability of the rest of the world to contain it on only one continent — because it can't be sealed off in Africa, it's already spreading elsewhere in the world, particularly the subcontinent of India and Pakistan — is so enormous. It's the worst health crisis in at least six, seven centuries. And it isn't only a health crisis.

The media are finally paying attention to this. I congratulate you and your colleagues for doing this, but the problem is not going to go away, and I hope the media don't go away either, because you are the key to breaking through on this issue.

It's Time to Treat Broadcasting Like Any Other Business



BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN

Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, is a regular columnist for CJR.

Television treated this year's election campaign as if it were merely a game, and covered this year's Summer Olympics as if it were an election campaign. "Rather than reporting on what the candidates stand for and providing analyses of the relative merits of their positions, network news is far more likely to reduce an election to a game — more likely to tell voters why candidates said something than what they said," concluded the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, which studied the networks' coverage of the presidential primaries.

And at the Olympic games in Sydney, rather than spend enough time televising what people wanted to see — the events themselves — NBC overdosed on treacly personality features about the participants.

The pattern of shrinking political coverage by the old-time networks was set during primary season. The Annenberg Center found that the average network spent just 36 seconds a night reporting what the candidates had to say during the primary weeks. CBS averaged 42 seconds, ABC 39 seconds, and NBC 29 seconds. When it came to the presidential debates, NBC skipped the first one, opting for baseball over public service. Fox TV, even more callous, snubbed them all. It couldn't resist making a killing by running entertainment and baseball in the presidential debate time slots. The former rake in money. The latter, broadcast without commercials, cost money.

Local stations played the game the same way, sacrificing politics for profits. The University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication found that sixteen of the nineteen TV stations in its national sample devoted an average of only 39 seconds a night to what the candidates had to say during the height of the primary campaigns. Top stations in Philadelphia and Tampa averaged just 6 seconds a night. The rest of their campaign news was devoted largely to spin and strategy.

Like television sports, television news has turned into a vast commercial market place, a network profit center instead of loss leader. Broadcast news, once considered a basic public-service responsibility in exchange for the broadcasters' free use of the airwaves, is now shaped entirely by bottom-line pressures. Feature stories on a candidate's favorite sandwich, best golf shot, or kissing style are far less demanding and more entertaining than thoughtful, hard-headed analyses of their positions on medical care, educational reform, or tax policy. Solid issues pieces take time, require journalistic expertise, and risk losing the audience — time that TV is no longer willing to give, expertise that few television reporters possess, and a possible audience loss that no broadcaster is willing to absorb. Better to take the easy way out and speculate about political strategy, the candidates' personalities, and the latest poll results.

To attract the public's attention in the absence of free TV time or meaningful TV coverage, campaigns do what companies have been doing for years — buy lots of commercials, estimated at almost a billion dollars' worth this election year alone. It's a sweetheart deal for broadcasters. Politicians give broadcasters the public airwaves free of charge and the broadcasters sell back the airwaves to the politicians at election time for millions of dollars. The thirteen NBC stations that belong to GE should pocket almost $40 million in campaign ads this year. The Fox TV-owned stations should take in almost $15 million. Yet neither group could find the time to carry all the presidential debates.

Political spots spike broadcasters' profits every four years. The growing glut of campaign commercials fills so much time they create a scarcity, enabling broadcasters to raise their prices to every advertiser. Television stations in New York and Philadelphia alone took in $21 million from candidates in a single U.S. Senate primary race in New Jersey, principally from the multimillions spent on campaign commercials by Democrat Jon Corzine, the ex-Wall Street mogul. Meanwhile, an Annenberg study found, the top-rated stations in New York and Philadelphia devoted just 13 seconds a night to what the New Jersey candidates had to say during the final two weeks of the primary campaign.

As Mark Danner put it so well in the *New York Review of Books* (September 21), this system "has left American television increasingly rich, American politics increasingly corrupt, and American voters increasingly ignorant." To make sure American television stays rich, American politics stay corrupt, and American voters stay ignorant, American broadcasters pour millions of dollars into lobbying to kill campaign finance reform that would limit how much

money can be spent on TV and would require free TV time for candidates.

Specifically, as reported by CJR ("Media Money," September/October), from 1996 through 1998, the National Association of Broadcasters and five major media conglomerates — ABC, CBS, A.H. Belo Corp., Meredith Corp., and Cox Enterprises, spent millions of dollars to defeat a dozen campaign-finance bills mandating free air time for political candidates. As the Center for Public Integrity discovered: ABC and the NAB spent more than $5 million lobbying against the Fairness in Political Advertising Act of 1995. The NAB, Belo, ABC, and CBS spent almost $10 million lobbying against passage of the Fairness in Political Advertising Act of 1997. More than $6 million was spent by Gannett, the NAB, CBS, and Meredith to defeat the Bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act of 1997. Several million dollars were spent by the same media companies to defeat the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act in 1997 and 1998 and the Public Voice Campaign Finance Reform Act of 1997. And, according to the center, that's only a partial list.

Notwithstanding the many stories on television news devoted to scandals involving money and politics, not a word has appeared about the broadcasters' high-price lobbying against campaign-finance reform, which Charles Lewis, director of the center, calls broadcasting's "dirty little secret."

It's time to bury the outdated public policy that treats American broadcasters as a privileged breed who operate as "public trustees" of the public airwaves. It's a myth and has been a myth for years. The industry long ago abandoned its special responsibility to serve "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." Let's treat broadcasters no differently from other businesses.

Cable operators pay 5 percent of their revenue to the municipalities whose streets and other facilities they use to string their cable. Cellular phone companies now have to buy from the federal government the electromagnetic frequencies they use. Ranchers pay to graze their cattle on public lands. Oil companies pay to drill in offshore waters. Let broadcasters, too, pay a fee to the federal government for the public frequencies they not only use but also buy and sell to each other so profitably. Having foregone their public-interest obligations, they can readily afford the price. ■

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Polls Speed Down Slippery Slope, But They Don't Have To



BY ANDREW KOHUT

Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, writes regularly for CJR about public attitudes toward the media.

Another election cycle has concluded, and I'm sure the polls will give a good accounting of why the election turned out as it did. But I've been troubled by the way polls were used in this election period. The pollsters and the news media have both contributed to the problems.

Polling is being used by the press less as a check on the conventional wisdom about voter opinion, and more as a way of underscoring the running story line with numbers. Polls are often conducted at the worst possible times for getting a reasoned reaction from voters to campaign events. They are reported breathlessly and then denounced when their ephemeral effects disappear, or conflict with what other polls subsequently show. Polls, and some pollsters, have become part of the tabloidization of political reporting. And more and more polls are being conducted on a judgmental rather than on a systematic basis.

These are not new problems. Polling has been on a slippery slope for some time, its credibility increasingly challenged. It does not have to be so. There are many ways in which the new information environment can enhance rather than worsen public opinion research.

PRESS PROBLEMS

Poll results too often are used to support an election news narrative and/or annotate the conventional wisdom. Using poll results that fit a story line is not new, but there are so many polls now that it's easy to find one that lends authority to a reporter's or editor's notions.

The attention given the results of a Zogby poll of Republican voters in South Carolina — taken one day after Senator John McCain's victory in New Hampshire and showing the Arizona Senator with a 44 percent to 39 percent lead — is the best case of this in campaign 2000. Based on one night of interviewing (February 2), it supported, if not created, the idea that McCain could triumph in that very loyalist GOP state. Zogby's findings were used widely and prominently by news organizations, many of whom are well aware of the tenuousness of survey results conducted so quickly on the heels of an important primary. A Lexis/Nexis search found the Zogby poll making forty-two newspapers — fourteen of which played it on page one. Three network TV broadcasts reported it, as did sixteen cable news programs. Was it big news, or was it news that fit the contagion of the media moment? Evidence suggests the latter. McCain would never hold a significant lead in any South Carolina poll except those taken in the immediate aftermath of his big New Hampshire win. In fact, as early as February 6, the ABC News/*Washington Post* poll had Bush in front by a significant margin, and he won the election by 53 percent to 42 percent.

The timing of polls to catch the bounce of a big event has created an unrealistic impression of voter volatility and makes polls look silly to ordinary people. That's particularly true of polls taken during, and just after, the nominating conventions. This year's prize goes to CNN and *USA Today* for ordering up a one-night Gallup poll after Al Gore's choice of Senator Joe Lieberman as his running mate. It found Bush's 19-percentage-point lead evaporating instantly, only to reappear a few days later. Similarly, *Newsweek* and others that polled just after each of the conventions reported dizzying shifts in opinion this year, as the unstable opinions of voters with low conviction were buffeted by news events.

These polls seem almost calculated to portray instability in public opinion rather than look at the underlying factors that make many voters unsure of their choice. The bounce is real, but often short-lived, and always confusing to audiences. People throw their hands up and dismiss the mystifying patterns in the polls, with good reason.

POLLSTER PROBLEMS

Differences in survey methods also added to polling confusion this year. There are legitimate debates about when and how to distinguish between eligible voters and those most likely to vote. But some polls are now using what poll takers call "judgment based" samples. Since the 1950's, the major polls — Gallup, Harris, and the leading national news organizations — have used scientifically random methods to draw their samples. But polls produce imperfect surveys because they must be conducted in short periods of time, often underrepresenting difficult-to-reach and uncooperative respondents. The samples are routinely corrected using demographic census data on sex, age, race, education, and other factors to help overcome sampling imbalances.

Newer polls, however — mostly those conducted by campaign consultants — take a different approach. They make corrections based on the pollster's suppositions about voters' party affiliation

— the percent who think of themselves as Republicans, Democrats, or independents. The problem is that party affiliation is an attitude, not a stable characteristic such as age or educational attainment. Furthermore, self-identification with the political parties changes over the course of campaigns, especially when one candidate has a big lead.

There has always been plenty of room for different approaches in polling, but personal judgments about the composition of the sample have not been part of the equation. This represents a real step backward in survey methodology and would have been unthinkable twenty years ago when pollsters prided themselves on systematic rather than idiosyncratic methods. It can also make a real difference. The Voter.com Battleground 2000 poll employing this method was the only survey to have Bush ahead around Labor Day when Gore was surging. Pundits, and the public alike, wondered why.

Pollsters have also become part of a tabloid approach to political reporting. Cable news programs often interview small samples of people registering their instant reactions to debates and speeches. Those interviews do not represent public opinion, only impromptu emotional responses.

MSNBC's regular use of the partisan GOP pollster Frank Luntz, without a Democratic counterpart, caught the attention of the Polling Review Board of the National Council on Public Polls, an association of pollsters who work for the news media. The board protested the partiality, noting that Luntz is deeply involved in Republican Party affairs, and once was cited by the American Association for Public Opinion research as being in violation of its ethics code.

While there is still a lot of good polling in news media reports, its value is diminished by these trends. As journalism has begun to rethink its values and practices, pollsters and the news organizations that employ them need to think through some of the ways that polling adds to the clutter and confusion in political reporting. The Internet, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, and an unquenchable desire for information all make this a potentially great time for polling. The issue is how to meet those needs with surveys that advance the principles of good journalism and serve the public interest. ■

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Teaching Censorship To the Next Generation



BY KEN STEINKEN

Ken Steinken (kensteinken@juno.com) teaches journalism and English at Stevens High School in Rapid City, South Dakota, and has been a part-time staff writer for the *Rapid City Journal* since 1986.

In the fall of 1998, during my fourth year as a student newspaper adviser, my world changed. Never in the history of Stevens High School had the *Raider Generation* been subject to prior administrative review. The newspaper has served as the voice of the students since 1968. But ten years after *Hazelwood* v. *Kuhlmeier*, the Supreme Court decision that granted school officials vast authority over the content of high school papers, the new era hit Rapid City, South Dakota.

A front-page news article about a proposed random drug-search policy set off the change. Particularly offensive to the principal was a staged photo illustration: a student lying in the hallway with a large dog sniffing his chest. If I hadn't been so excited about the effort the photo class put into the photo, I might have anticipated the principal's response. The photo was clearly labeled an illustration but we were chastised because local drug dogs are not allowed to search people. In the future, we were told, the principal would read *Raider Generation* before it went to press.

At first the opinion page was to be exempt. But soon it, too, fell under the censor's scalpel. Honest, but less-than-complimentary reviews of several student music and drama presentations met with administrative disapproval, as did a post-Columbine piece about the fallacy of thinking that there are ways to make a school totally safe. The paper was banned from reviewing student productions. The Columbine article was ordered to be replaced with a statement from the administration designed to reassure students of their safety.

I was already tenured when I took over the adviser position. During my first four years as a teacher the principal and I had open discussions about the newspaper and its content. I explained things. She made suggestions. I listened and she listened.

I had never sought confrontation with the administration, and had always worked to help the students understand the responsibilities that go hand in hand with freedom of speech, to ask the ethical question, "Should we do this?" as well as "Can we do this?"

I constantly reminded them that those covered in articles are people with lives and feelings, not just subjects of a story. After our discussions I left it up to the student editors to make the final decisions.

A student newspaper adviser lives in a perilous paradox. I must champion my students' right to freedom of expression, and I must obey a supervisor who has neither journalistic training nor an understanding of the wall that should exist between the publisher, which my principal considers herself, and the publication. Add to this a principal's concern about the school's public image, and the fact that the publishing costs and adviser's salary are paid by the school district, and you have the ingredients for conflict.

Hazelwood has armed administrators with a weapon to enforce their agenda, whatever that might be, as long as it can be veiled with "legitimate pedagogical concerns," in the words of the Supreme Court. Sadly, all too often the agenda is to teach students lessons about freedom but not to let them experience it.

After a stormy 1998-99 school year, the principal took the journalism and newspaper classes away from me and tried to prevent me from continuing my extracurricular position as the *Raider Generation*'s adviser. I received a scathing evaluation from the principal that accused me of being unprofessional. Had I not been tenured, I could have been fired for no specific reason. Had I refused to remove articles that the administration found objectionable, I could have been dismissed for insubordination.

I was in contact with the Student Press Law Center, the Washington, D.C., organization dedicated to freedom of the student press. But I soon found out that the ideals of the law I had learned at a center workshop in 1997 do not easily translate into the real world. We documented what the center considered a pretty good case. But a law firm to take the case pro bono was not available.

I was able to continue as the school newspaper adviser, thanks to the efforts of the Rapid City Education Association. We made it through the year without any confrontations. Some of the kids who had an interest in testing boundaries had graduated. The principal decided to focus on other things. I am teaching journalism again.

So the pressure's off, for now at least. But I have to wonder. What about all those other schools where the newspaper adviser is not tenured, or is intimidated by the administration? What lessons will the student staffs of those newspapers learn?

Maybe they'll be better prepared for a wall-free world of journalism. Maybe they won't revolt when the publisher shares profits with the subject of a special section or when the editor promises positive editorial coverage to a mayor who endorses a newspaper's proposed merger. Maybe the world is changing for all of us. ■



"The Knight Fellowship offers you a chance to expand the framework from which you view the world. In my case, it meant honing my Chinese, taking classes at the Business School and learning to scuba dive. I absorbed things from the perspective of 'learning and experiencing' versus the 'report and edit' mode that had become habitual. And what a wonderful world that is!"

— ***Lisa Hsia, Senior Producer, NBC/Dateline***
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— ***Sheila Stainback, Fox News***
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— ***Jack Davis, President, Publisher and CEO***
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The Obligation of a Free Press: New Search for Accountability



BY GENEVA OVERHOLSER

Geneva Overholser (genevaoh@aol.com), a syndicated columnist for The Washington Post Writers Group, writes regularly for CJR about newspapers. She is a member of the University of Missouri journalism faculty in Washington. Among positions she has held are editorial writer for *The New York Times*, editor of *The Des Moines Register*, and ombudsman for *The Washington Post*. She also served nine years on the Pulitzer Prize board.

Picture this: Henry R. Luce, editor-in-chief of *Time*, is sitting in a meeting of the Encyclopaedia Britannica board of directors, along with University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins. Luce passes Hutchins a note, saying, "How do I find out about the freedom of the press and what my obligations are?"

That's exactly what happened nearly sixty years ago, according to Stephen Bates's intriguing 1995 study, *Realigning Journalism with Democracy: The Hutchins Commission, Its Times, and Ours* (find it at www.annenberg.nwu.edu).

Now, imagine Tony Ridder or John Curley — not to mention Sumner Redstone or Michael Eisner — passing that note today.

It might be a good time to look back at what was interesting about the Hutchins Commission's work.

Certainly the responsibilities and challenges the commission addressed echo powerfully with us: the importance of free expression as protector of other freedoms. The challenge to media to provide "a service adequate to the needs of the society." The existence of "practices which the society condemns" — and the worry that these could lead to regulation and control.

Then there's our power to shape opinions and our penchant for the "inflammatory, sensational, and irresponsible." Our arrogance: "The press is not free if those who operate it behave as though their position conferred on them the privilege of being deaf to ideas which the processes of free speech have brought to public attention."

Also familiar are worries over uneven access to media, as well as the persistent, distorting pressures of ownership and marketplace. And press accountability: "Its moral right will be conditioned on its acceptance of this accountability. Its legal right will stand unaltered as its moral duty is performed."

With all these concerns very much with us, people are once again wondering how we can strengthen the press and protect press freedom — a challenge that's been around ever since the nation's founding. John Adams wrote in 1815: "If there is ever to be an amelioration of the condition of mankind, philosophers, theologians, legislators, politicians, and moralists will find that the regulation of the press is the most difficult, dangerous, and important problem they have to resolve."

The Hutchins Commission recommended "a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press." It would compare "the accomplishments of the press with the aspirations which the people have for it" and "educate the people" about the press's role. No such agency resulted, though a National News Council, incorporating some of its ideas, came briefly into being twenty-six years later.

This past summer, Peter Goldmark, c.e.o. of the *International Herald Tribune*, suggested in an Aspen Institute speech an intriguing variation on the national agency notion. Goldmark proposed that executives of corporations that include media outlets fund "an independent council to track, promote, examine, and defend the independent news function in America and in the world at large.

"Give it teeth, give it a good budget . . . . Probably $5 million a year minimum," he recommended. "Make the grants multi-year. To select the first board and the first c.e.o., put together a nominating committee that is completely independent of your corporate structure and turn them loose."

Goldmark noted, "We have a National Academy of Science. We have National Endowments for . . . you name it, Arts, Democracy, Education, Humanities . . . . But we have no prestigious, national, institutionalized advocate for the independence and vitality of the most distinctive non-governmental tradition in our democracy. And . . . it must of course be created, sustained, and funded outside government." (Excerpt from the speech, page 72.)

I'd add the suggestion that it be tied to a university (could my joining the University of Missouri J-school faculty have something to do with this?). The Pulitzer Board and Columbia University provide a professional/university relationship beneficial to the press. Goldmark's academy could draw strength from a similar relationship.

What would the agency do? The Hutchins report sets out possibilities: Development of common principles. Scrutiny of government actions affecting media. Support for centers of research and criticism. Fostering of public discussion of the press's contributions and responsibilities.

Other recommendations, such as assessment of specific stories, seem less appropriate. Local and perhaps state news councils could strengthen accountability, but a national council is too broad for that.

Discussion there must be, and, increasingly, discussion there is. Goldmark's idea is an intriguing addition. ■

The Livingston Awards

For Young Journalists



Sean Patrick Lyons

Waterbury (CT) *Republican-American*, accepts the award from Howell Raines for 1999 local reporting



Ken Ward Jr.

Charleston (WV) *Gazette*, is presented the award by Mike Wallace for 1999 national reporting



Kevin Heldman

APBnews.com, receives the award from Clarence Page for 1999 international reporting

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Deadline for 2000 entries: February 1, 2001

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author, media columnist, *The New Yorker*

Tom Brokaw
anchor and managing editor, NBC nightly news with Tom Brokaw

Osborn Elliott
dean emeritus, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Ellen Goodman
associate editor and columnist, *The Boston Globe*

Clarence Page
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Howell Raines
editorial page editor, *The New York Times*

Mike Wallace
senior correspondent and co-editor, "60 Minutes," *CBS News*

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'Can You Hear It?': A Challenge to Media C.E.O.s



BY PETER C. GOLDMARK JR.

In August, Peter C. Goldmark Jr., chairman and c.e.o. of the *International Herald Tribune*, gave the keynote talk at the Fourth Annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society. These are excerpts adapted from the speech. Goldmark formerly was head of the Rockefeller Foundation and has held governmental positions, and was with the Times Mirror Company from 1985 to 1988, serving as vice president for Eastern newspapers and then senior vice president.

I have watched the discussion in the United States about whether our journalistic values are decaying. This is an important debate. It is becoming, also, an old debate.

The role of America in the world and the prominence of her press in her political struggles and evolution have kept the spotlight sharply focused on the American code of journalistic values. Although it is by no means an exclusively American tradition, it is strongest here. Yet even here in America it is fragile — more fragile than we understand. Truly independent journalism is relatively new in human history.

What are the basic ingredients of this tradition of an independent news function in our society?

- First, independence from any political influence or commercial sway. The quality of that independence needs to be redefined by each generation, and can never be taken for granted.
- Second, legal guarantees and protections, which in the American case are sewn deep into the constitutional fabric.
- Third, a bright, clear line between opinion and reportage.
- Fourth, a nosy, assertive inquisitiveness, a restless curiosity to look behind closed doors.
- Fifth, the quest for relevance. Let's spend a moment on this one. Relevance means focusing on what turns out to matter. If you were an editor in the German principality of Saxony in the sixteenth century and you decided to cover in depth the pomp and pageantry surrounding the marriage of the next Holy Roman Emperor, and decided to pay no attention to a young monk named Martin Luther, you would run a serious risk of having ordered up coverage that was irrelevant. Your readers may have been more interested in the marriage. But measured by the test of what turned out to be important and formative, you would have failed. In the end journalism that is not relevant will not be judged to have been great journalism. And in that hard reality lies a great portion of our most difficult challenge today.

◆

I believe there is a special characteristic of this period in which you and I live, and I believe it is this: for the first time in history the human race is faced with a set of ultimata. The first is the threat of weapons of mass destruction, whether delivered by missile by a foreign power, or delivered in a truck or in a jar by a terrorist. A second is the deterioration of the planet's ecosystems brought on by the pace and extent of human economic activity.

I have stated the adventure in intellectual terms. Let me try it in more human terms . . .

Can you hear it? Can you hear the hissing wind as it whistles across thousands of acres of sand and waste that used to be part of the Aral Sea?

Beyond this summer afternoon in Colorado, beyond the beautiful evening light, the breeze, the mountains, and skyscapes of this stunning countryside . . . Can you see it? Can you see the Irani diplomats and government agents striding purposefully, in neat dark suits, through customs, getting their passports stamped, as they fan out across the world to acquire the components of a nuclear arsenal?

Can you see the children of El Guasmo? El Guasmo is a slum in Guayaquil in Ecuador, a poor country allowed to go bankrupt. We bailed out Lockheed, Chrysler, New York City, some of Asia, Russia several times over . . . But not Ecuador. Can you see the net resources of their poor country flowing north?

Can you see the bottom of the sea? Where the dragging scoops and nets have crossed are gashes and furrows — vast, rake-like gashes and marks left by huge American and European fishing drags. It is barren — a desert.

Are we covering these stories with the attention and in the depth they deserve? No, we are not. There are reasons for this.

First, as with most large, ill-defined, new trends, the players along the political spectrum are sufficiently confused about them to appear to require qualification, caution, and defensive presentation of offsetting views in reporting them. What is more damning to our present journalistic performance in the case of the two ultimata I have mentioned, however, is that the relevant scientific and expert communities are far more broadly agreed than are the politicians that both trends are profound and dangerous.

Second, the two ultimata I have mentioned are difficult to react to. A time horizon of one, two, three decades is not something we have much experience in reporting on. And the arena for much of this is global, and global news coverage is among the most expensive to mount, and among the most unsuccessful in attracting audiences.

Third, there are powerful groups who have shown themselves thus far to be uninterested in bringing attention to these problems in any realistic way.

In the case of the spread and eventual use of weapons of mass destruction, the picture is so grim that the experts and their political masters

have decided not to discuss this subject, for two reasons: first, because some of them believe that to discuss it is to make it more likely — a proposition that needs to be debated. And secondly, because they see very little they can recommend to counter this threat within the context of presently acceptable political alternatives. And therefore they do not want to raise a big, messy problem for which they have no immediate answers. (Does that raise an echo for you? That is what we did for a decade with the problem of AIDS. That is what Barton Gellman laid bare this summer in his brilliant reporting in *The Washington Post* on the history of the AIDS crisis).

In the case of the environment, a strange and uneasy alliance of business and government simply does not want to face the scale, cost, and dislocation that would be required to respond seriously to environmental deterioration.

To report the distinctive challenges of our moment in history will take some changes.

◆

I know big corporations can be soulless, greedy, and destructive. But in a world where avenues of communication are multiplying, where censorship and control of news by the state in general is declining, and where technology is lowering the entry barriers to the communications field, I have trouble pointing to the single characteristic of size alone and saying that this is a mortal danger to good journalism.

That said, what can we do to cement the value of the journalistic enterprise within these huge corporate empires? I have four suggestions:

■ One: The c.e.o. of any large company that contains a serious news organization should meet once a year, with other c.e.o.s of similar organizations and with other independent figures in the news field, to assess the health, independence, and status of his or her news organization.

■ Two: Each company that owns a news organization should designate a member of its board of directors to assume a special responsibility for oversight and protection of the independence and strength of that news organization. They all have audit committees. They have compensation committees, no? This value — the value of an independent press — is infinitely greater.

■ Three: Invite an annual outside review — call it an audit if you like — of the independence and vigor of your news function. Choose the reviewers among the best, the most skilled, the most independent in the world — the Ben Bradlees, the Robin MacNeils, the Anthony Sampsons, the Punch Sulzbergers — and commit yourself to publish that review. What reason would you have not to? Are you afraid of what it might say? Is the subject not important enough?

■ Four: Fund, jointly with your sister companies, an independent council to track, promote, examine, and defend the independent news function in America and in the world at large. Give it teeth, give it a good budget.

I believe it is proper to ask: Can we keep alive the journalistic values that we have inherited? Can we live up to the high standards of those who have applied those values before us? But I believe the fullest answer to those questions is less likely to be found in debating incessantly exactly what those values were, and to what degree and in what respects they are thriving or attenuating. I think the answers are more likely to be found in the hard work of applying those values in practice to the distinctive contemporary tasks we face. That is how we shall be judged. ■

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Deadline, the Television Show: At Least It's Good Storytelling



BY MARVIN KITMAN

Marvin Kitman is the TV critic of *Newsday*.

The above-average TV viewer wanting to grow up to be a journalist can learn a lot from *Deadline*, a show that could do for journalism of the early twenty-first century what *Front Page* did for the last century.

To be a superstar columnist like two-fisted Wallace Benton (Oliver Platt) you have to be able to drink Bushmills doubles, one in each hand. You have to wear three-piece suits with bow ties and scarves. You have to make $300,000 a year and live in an inherited duplex studio at Forty-five Tudor City Plaza. You need J-school students in your investigative journalism seminar doing your leg work, in exchange for your getting to sleep with the best, or maybe the prettiest, of them — the ink-stained version of *droit de seigneur*.

It's not enough to be a talented writer cum professor "who brings light in the darkest recesses of the human heart," as the Pulitzer Prize judges said, handing him his award. Or a crusading journalist with principles. ("It runs," as Benton says in the premiere, referring to one of his columns, "or I walk.") He has to be a crime solver.

You may just want to grow up to be editor of a major New York daily. (A much better job, I say, as one who has been a superstar columnist.) For that, you have to be a gorgeous woman like Bebe Neuwirth, who plays Platt's editor. Not only should you have legs that won't quit, but you have to be able to swallow your pride and sleep with mayoral candidates, even one on the lam from the law, whom your paper is supposed to be covering dispassionately and objectively.

And then there is the best of all possible jobs in journalism — publisher/owner. You have to speak with an Australio-British accent, like Tom Conti, have an extraordinary gift for writing headlines in five words or less, an art form more difficult, if less subtle, than haiku. And put up with the guff from superstar columnists who are trying to get left-wing drivel into your tab — pulling "that Spartacus stuff," as Conti puts it in the second episode.

I'm a huge fan of Wallace Benton and his bosses at the so-called *New York Ledger*, a newspaper that has an uncanny resemblance in typeface and in-your-face journalism to an existing New York newspaper. Around my local newsstand we call it — lest it be said to bear any resemblance to a real newspaper — the *New York Pest*.

The folks at the *Ledger* have replaced my former role model at the fictional *Los Angeles Tribune*, remembered by many more young TV media scholars than the *Herald-Tribune* or even the *World*.

Lou Grant (Ed Asner) was my idea of a real journalist. The wonderful, wise, humane, rugged, tough but always decent former boss of Mary Richards was the city editor of the *Trib* before it folded in 1982. His staff always made him tear his hair out, at least whatever was left after dealing with that anchorman in Minneapolis. He had his hands full with reporters Rossi (Robert Walden) and Newman (Linda Kelsey), Animal the staff photographer (Daryl Anderson), not to mention Mrs. Pynchon (Nancy Marchand).

Now there was a publisher for you. A starchy, steely-eyed grande dame of print journalism, she had a family always pushing for her to dump the paper and do something meaningful with her life, like running taco stands. "A whole greasy chain of them," she said in the premiere episode in 1977. I also was influenced by Clark Kent, whose journalistic exploits have never received proper recognition, given his activities away from the *Daily Planet*.

As a role model Benton is nothing like what I imagined of, say, Heywood Broun. He is established immediately in the premiere as one of those investigative reporters who is a born liar but loves the truth. ("It's the truth if I write it," he explains.) He is a man who continually tells half-truths, three-quarters truths, an arrogant conniver who cheats, cons, and misleads people he is writing about.

But I love Benton anyway. My caped crusader, above all else, is somebody who can admit he is not perfect. In the premiere we learn he has sent a man Up the River for a crime he didn't commit. That didn't stop Benton. He continued to write about the man's obvious guilt. Two years later, he saw the error of his ways. Using his grad students as unpaid peons, he breaks the case again. And is justly rewarded. Instead of shaking his hand, one of the wrongly accused uses it to punch Benton in the nose. Something a lot of ink-stained wretches at real newspapers would want to do by now.

There is a guessing game going on in journalism circles about which wretched fellow Benton really is based on: Breslin, McAlary, Barnicle are the leading candidates. It's not Clyde Haberman or Abe Rosenthal or Liz Smith.

My own guess is the legendary

CAROL KITMAN

Australian-American columnist Steve Dunleavy. Informed sources say Dunleavy, the Waltzing Matilda of New York journalism, is also more like Conti as the owner of the *Ledger* than Rupert Murdoch (who owns the *Post*). Conti's rap is what Dunleavy used to sound like back in the good old days when he was running the *Pest*.

A lot of my colleagues are falling off their bar stools, in between Bushmills, laughing at the inaccuracies in this Dick Wolf/Robert Palm show. Some of it is risible. The notion that a journalist would get in bed with a source, even a mayoralty candidate, is hilarious, even though it is true that sex makes strange bedfellows.

Sure *Deadline* is filled with inaccuracies. But what TV drama is accurate about any profession? *ER*? Every five minutes somebody pushing a gurney is crashing through the doors. In fact, *ER* may stand for Everybody Running. Ask the people who have to sit around for hours waiting for treatment.

When was the last time you saw a doctor or lawyer show, in which the practitioner submitted a bill? Even *Law & Order* — the sainted Dick Wolf's most realistic show — manages to solve every crime in twenty-nine minutes. You can set your clock by it. And justice is equally swift.

The way I judge accuracy in drama is by giving the producers the same margin of error accorded those reality news polls on who's ahead in the elections: 3 to 5 percent error allowable in either direction. *Deadline* passes my test.

It is not as farfetched as most other serious shows about professions. It is near fetched.

Movies and TV usually create an ambiance for newsrooms that never exists. You never get a clean look at what a newspaper really is in *Deadline*, either — which is mostly people staring at damn computers, trying to get them to do something, and trying to avoid too much work. It doesn't show you all the drudgery involved in developing and writing a story. You didn't get to see the eight versions of this review, either.

As uneven as it may be as documentary evidence of the newspaper process, at least *Deadline* has the DNA of credibility. You get to see how the editors conduct their daily news meetings, doping out the front page, the headlines, and pictures. Even the copy boy Feldman being needed by a superstar columnist to fix a computer glitch has a ring of truth to it.

It's interesting to see how Benton goes about dancing on the line of the illegal and unethical for the greater good of getting the story — simple things like getting into an apartment building for an interview by pushing all the bells at once. The teleplays so far by co-creator /producer and writer Robert Palm and others also show the difference between columnists and reporters. Freewheeling columnists like Benton have huge freedoms reporters don't. Columnists can extend a story, almost writing a kind of personal novella for the paper, as opposed to reporters who, god forbid, should let a line of their own expression color their pieces.

I especially like the way Wolf and Palm use real stories for their plots — before the headlines fade into the fantasy world of TV drama. One early episode was especially informative, dealing with a Columbia College student who threw a rock during the uprising of 1968 and was forced to go underground. The story brings up the Red Squad of the NYPD, which infiltrated student movements. Anybody who threw a rock in 1968 was automatically a communist. Whatever the arguments professionals may have against *Deadline* as journalism, it's good storytelling — which is what television as well as journalism is all about.

I worry now that writer-professor Wallace Benton will morph into Columbo with a bow tie. NBC's head programmer, Garth Ancier, promised advertisers in May that that's who he really is. Don't be misled by all this journalism stuff. If the ratings plunge, *Deadline* could become just another cops and robbers series, with Benton solving all the cases the police are not bright enough to crack. *Lou Grant*, to its eternal credit and probably its doom, strove to be more than that. It dealt with real journalistic issues, protecting sources, censorship, torture in Latin American dictatorships unmistakably similar to Nicaragua, book burning, and all that other (what Tom Conti would call) "left-wing drivel." It was the *Mother Jones* of TV journalism shows. It will be interesting to see whether *Deadline* follows the same downmarket path of the once clarion of left-wing drivel, the legendary *New York Post*. ■

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ANNOUNCING

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BOOKS

The Worst Job in Washington



The speaker and his spokesman: Ike and Hagerty, left; LBJ and Moyers, center; Reagan and Fitzwater, right

BY BILL MONROE

Millions of red-blooded American boys and girls grow up wanting to be president. But red-blooded American journalists do not grow up wanting to be presidential press secretary. With the exception of Marlin Fitzwater.

Fitzwater, the press mediator for Bush and Reagan, was smitten as a boy with an exhibit he saw in the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas — a huge blowup of Jim Hagerty sitting on the steps of a Colorado cottage with President Eisenhower. It was obvious to Fitzwater that the press secretary is the man who vacations with the president.

Alas, the press secretary seldom gets to sit around with his wife, let alone the president. Quite the contrary. The general indifference of journalists to the White House spokesman role speaks well of their prudence and common sense.

Take Charlie Ross, for example. In 1931, as Washington bureau chief of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, he wrote, "My advice to all presidents is not to put up a newspaper man to meet the press. Choose a politician."

Ross also wrote that "A newspaper man ought to be that and nothing else. . . . Newspaper men turned public officials try to be both, and they rarely succeed. Sooner or later, they will have the 'chief' on their backs for giving out too much information, or the newspaper men on their backs for giving out too little."

Fourteen years after he uttered that wisdom the press secretary job fell on Charlie Ross out of a clear blue sky.

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE PRESIDENT? THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY FROM CLEVELAND TO CLINTON
BY W. DALE NELSON. SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS 255 PP. $29.95; PAPERBACK $16.95

When Franklin Roosevelt suffered a fatal stroke, Ross's old schoolmate, Harry Truman, had suddenly become president. Truman immediately asked Ross to join him in the White House.

Ross not only had a dim view of the press aide's job but he was enjoying working in Washington for his publisher, Joseph Pulitzer, Jr. He was also making three times what he would receive in the White House. Against the better judgment of his wife, Ross accepted the Truman offer. "This man," he told Florence Ross, "needs help."

Five years later, as he was about to repeat into a network microphone part of a White House briefing he had just given reporters, Ross slumped over sideways. Frank Bourgholtzer of NBC at first thought it was a joke, Ross demonstrating dramatically how tired he was. But Charlie Ross was dead of a heart attack.

Truman chose Joseph Short of the Baltimore *Sun* to succeed Ross. Some two years later Short proceeded to die of a heart ailment. "I feel as if I killed them," said the stunned president.

According to the thorough and convincing research of W. Dale Nelson, a former White House reporter for The Associated Press, speaking for presidents can not only be dangerous to your health — it can also be dangerous to your reputation, your leisure time, your sleep, your marriage, your familyhood, and your peace of mind.

Who Speaks for the President?, now available in paperback as well as hardcover, makes it clear that the ill-fated Charlie Ross knew what he was talking about. The book starts right out with the basic, implacable problem in the triangulation of president, press, and press secretary. This story, we're told, circulated in Washington in 1897:

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MISCELLANEOUS

"FOLLOW THE MONEY," Deep throat instructed. "It's the Economy, Stupid!" James Carville advised. Take their advice —and study business journalism in NYC. Master the fundamentals. Develop a beat. Study full-time or part-time with expert journalists at Baruch College/CUNY. Fellowships available. Admission spring or fall. For information, contact the Master's Program in Business Journalism. 212 802-6640 or Joshua_Mills@baruch.cuny.edu

As Grover Cleveland prepared to enter the White House for his second term, a Washington journalist offered him some advice on the selection of a new private secretary.

"We were hoping," the president-elect's caller said, "that you will appoint a man who will be good to us newspaper men."

"I had a notion," said Cleveland, "of appointing a man who would be good to me."

There they are, the two sides pulling the press secretary in opposite directions. On one side, Washington reporters, identifying their interests with the national interest and righteously urging appointment of a fox to guard the informational chicken coop. On the other side, the president, hoping, somewhat plaintively, that his own appointee might pay some attention to his own political requirements. And between these grindstones,

IN THE CLASSICAL ENDING TO THIS STORY THE PRESIDENT FIRES YOU AND THE PRESS SAYS GOOD RIDDANCE

the hapless press secretary, being buffeted toward the inevitable climax in which he or she is seen, sometimes by both sides, as an incompetent and a scumbag.

In the classical ending to this story the president fires you and the press says good riddance.

To begin with, the author notes, few presidents are fond of reporters. Lyndon Johnson called them "spies." Woodrow Wilson called them "contemptible spies." Nixon considered them part of his opposition. Roosevelt and Kennedy were convivial with journalists in public but excoriated them in private.

Some presidents give their press secretaries total access to White House meetings and events. Others keep them in the dark. Some press secretaries enjoy a brief honeymoon, implicitly trusted by the president and the press. But then comes a crisis, a gaffe, a misjudgment, not to mention unexpected snags, such as rivalries inside the White House staff. A White House observer penned a classic description of the reptilian bureaucrat, in this case a Herbert Hoover aide who quietly undermined Hoover's confidence in his press secretary: "unobtrusive as a fleeting shadow and as smooth."

Nelson has written a book full of whirling crises, good stories, and a spectrum of personalities. Here is George Reedy, Lyndon Johnson's pipe-smoking philosopher-spokesman. Pierre Salinger, in the words of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "entertaining the press with jocular daily briefings." Larry Speakes putting out "quotes" for Ronald Reagan that Reagan has never seen. And Jody Powell falsely denying knowledge of the ill-fated Iran hostage-rescue mission — a lie sanctioned in retrospect as a life-and-death necessity by the man who was deceived, the *Los Angeles Times* reporter Jack Nelson.

But, for all of its Oval Office dramatics, the book does not quite equal the sum of its parts. It is, for better and for worse, an Associated Press sort of undertaking. (Declaration of conscience here: I'm a former Unipresser.)

Who Speaks . . .? has the feel of impeccable research and reliability. (Although Barbara Gamarekian of the JFK White House may deplore the transposition that delivers her name as Garamekian, I would not be surprised if that turned out to be the only mistake in the book.) The writing is straight, no frills. Nelson is a published poet, but he does not squander any poetry on presidents or press secretaries.

The book goes "from Cleveland to Clinton," as advertised, but no farther than a few days into Clinton's second term. We do not get to struggle with Talking Head Mike McCurry through the mire of Monica and impeachment. We do not get to visit Clinton's lame duckery with Joe Lockhart.

While all fifteen chapters add to the lore of press secretaries, their lives and times, Nelson does not connect up the chapters to drive home any themes or theories or prescriptions for the future. It seems to occur to him, however, that his chapters are not speaking to each other. So, on the last page, trying to tie things together, he comes up with a parting thought reminiscent of a White House TV reporter out on the South Lawn trying to add a bit of weight to a forty-second stand-upper: "As the White House and its press contingent geared up for a new century, however, one thing remained unchanged. In the end, it was the president who spoke for the president." Ah so.

But enough of this nitpicking. Good AP reporting is readable stuff when you have a slice of journalistic history like this to deal with.

The book is sprinkled with surprises and an occasional shocker. Did you know that "Silent Cal" Coolidge held 520 press conferences? That Lyndon Johnson offered reporters a deal: he would help them become "big men" if they would look the other way when he ventured "into a strange bedroom"? That Helen Thomas called it an "act of war" when the brand-new Clinton White House cut off reporters' access to the press secretary?

There's even a patch of hilarity here and there.

Presidents are constantly trying to get their views across to the nation without having to be responsible for them. President Clinton, for example, once briefed reporters on the basis that his remarks could be attributed only to "the highest authority." That more or less gave readers the option of mentally assigning the material to God or, on the earthly level, the president. "The highest authority" talked about Russia, about the books he was reading, even about his daughter Chelsea's dating. Somehow word got out that this was coming from the local deity in the White House. The "highest authority" dodge had to be scrapped.

If Clinton's pressman had read Dale Nelson's book before this incident, the whole embarrassment might have been avoided. In the 1920s, before there was a designated White House spokesman, President Coolidge regularly let himself be quoted as a "White House spokesman." But the cover quickly wore thin. One correspondent wrote that the "mythical spokesman for the president" seemed to show up in the papers on the mornings after presidential news conferences. And Raymond Clapper, writing in *Editor & Publisher*, went so far as to provide a physical description of the spokesman: "a thin, sandy-haired, small-mouthed, solemn little Vermonter."

Coolidge abandoned the "spokesman" device. But this only resulted in new heights of awkwardness, such as: "Those in a position to know the mind of the president revealed today . . . ."

At this point, it would seem, Raymond Clapper gave up the chase. Otherwise, he would certainly have noted in *Editor & Publisher* that " 'those in a position to know the mind of the president' are a thin, small-mouthed, solemn little Vermonter." ■

Bill Monroe is a former newspaperman and moderator of NBC's Meet the Press.

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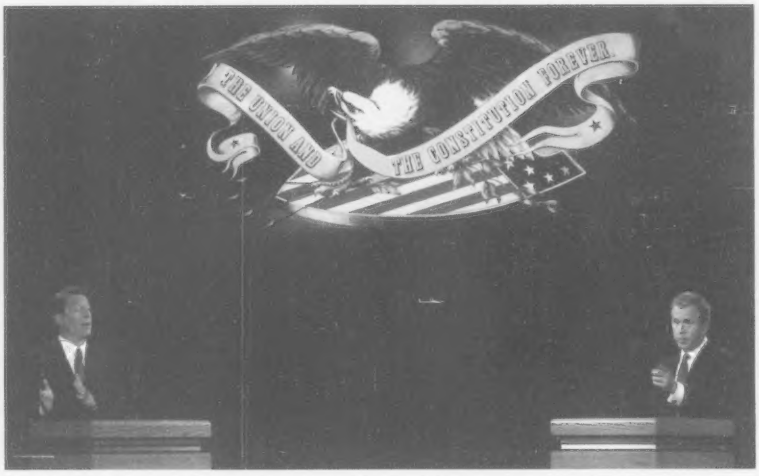


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AP WIDEWORLD/RON EDMONDS

October 3 in Massachusetts: the ghosts of past debates were never far from mind

BY EVAN CORNOG

The first presidential debate between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy in Chicago on the evening of September 26, 1960, has been rightly hailed as a political turning point: the pale Nixon — underweight, still recovering from a knee operation, and unwilling to submit to a professional makeup job — was outshone by the tanned and telegenic Kennedy, whose victory in that debate prepared the way for his triumph in November. The Kingdom of the Image had come and, with it, what Daniel Boorstin dubbed the "pseudo-event."

Except, as Alan Schroeder points out in his thorough account of all the televised presidential debates, the "low-key media atmosphere of the time" was far different from that of recent years. On the day of the first debate, *The New York Times* ran only a short piece on the subject, and it was on page 22. *The Washington Post* had nothing, and neither did that week's *Time* magazine. History, as is its habit, had sneaked up on journalism. The broadcast of the event was different, too. When the program ended, there was no post-debate analysis, no pundits pronouncing, no spin-doctors spinning, no pollsters polling. Those watching ABC were presented with the *Original Amateur Hour*, CBS's viewers were shown a taped interview with Lyndon Johnson that was part of its *Presidential Countdown* series, and NBC's patrons were given a bowling show hosted by Milton Berle. It is a set of choices that checks one's initial impulse to pine for the good old days.

At the same time, the event was not quite the innocent relic it seems. As with every debate since, the guidelines were established by the campaigns, although the negotiations were not as extensive and sophisticated as they have become. Kennedy's greatest advantage was not his tan but the fact that he understood, as Schroeder puts it, that the debate was a "TV show," whereas Nixon saw it as a "rhetorical exercise." Kennedy's adviser Clark Clifford told the candidate to add "greater warmth to [his] image," and representatives of both campaigns harangued CBS's Don Hewitt, the producer for the first debate, to be balanced in his camera shots.

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES: FORTY YEARS OF HIGH-RISK TV
BY ALAN SCHROEDER
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS. 280 PP. $24.95

Journalism, as is its habit, was quick to sense that the rules had changed. Although coverage at first dwelled on the issues discussed, it soon turned to the aspects of performance. *Newsweek* reported that the biggest question that arose after the debate was "Why did Nixon look so haggard, so worn, and so grim?" This concern with appearances, which has remained central to the process, took hold that first year. In the

third Kennedy-Nixon debate, the candidates debated from separate studios — Nixon in California, Kennedy in New York. To insure equal conditions, ABC dressed the sets in identical cloth backdrops, and the "same can of paint used on the New York set was hand-carried on a plane to Los Angeles so the colors would precisely match." Such lunatic precision would become the standard for future contests.

It was sixteen years before presidential debates resumed, with the contest between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. The legacy of the Kennedy-Nixon debates guaranteed that there would be much more pre-debate coverage, and Schroeder argues that the twenty-seven-minute failure of the sound system in the studio near the end of the first debate opened the door for punditry and spin, as TV anchors scrambled to fill the dead airtime. Ford's statement in the second debate that there was no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, which, inexplicably, he failed to recant effectively, established a second rule of debates — that nothing was more vital than avoiding a gaffe.

A third rule soon became apparent: each debater is judged not against some absolute standard of astuteness or accuracy but against the expectations the audience (i.e., the press) has of him or her. These expectations are all-important and can be very long-lived. Consider the case of Bob Dole. As Gerald Ford's running mate in 1976, he had participated in the first vice presidential debate, against Walter Mondale. Dole treated the debate process with contempt, scarcely studying for the encounter in advance and then making acerbic comments about how boring the debates were. When he tried to link Mondale with the deaths of soldiers killed in what he called "Democrat wars," he cemented a reputation for nasty partisanship that he was never able to shake. Running against Bill Clinton twenty years later, Dole turned in a somnolent performance in the debates, fearing that the result of attacking Clinton's character would be not to sully the image of Bill Clinton but to revive the image of nasty Bob Dole.

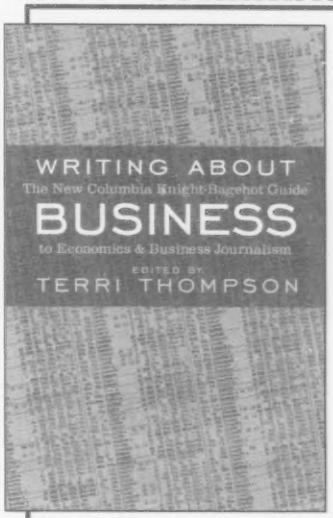
Schroeder's chronicle of the debates serves as a mini-history of the transformation of American journalism over the past few decades, as news outlets multiplied, the news cycle accelerated, and deference to political leaders was replaced by aggressive, sometimes contemptuous, treatment (which was reciprocated). Throughout his book, Schroeder cites scholarly studies of the changes in news coverage of the debates — the way, for example, interpretive stories have grown in importance and descriptive stories have receded, and the shift in coverage from a focus on the issues debated to obsessive interest in the forms and nuances of the confrontation itself. Yet the rise of the image was already being lamented in 1960, when Don Hewitt worried that the impact of TV debates would be to elect a "matinee idol," and the historian Henry Steele Commager feared that televised debates would elevate "the glib, the evasive, the dogmatic, the melodramatic" over more sober virtues.

Jimmy Carter said in the wake of Watergate that he wanted to give the nation "a government as good and honest and truthful . . . as are the American people." (It has also been said that nations get the governments they deserve, which seems, after all, to carry the same message.) And the truth about the debate process, and of presidential campaigning in general, is that it is a rational and sensible test for the nation's chief executive. One of the many critics quoted by Schroeder complains that debates are a poor test for a potential president, because leading a government depends on the ability to build a team, to work with opponents, to compromise, while debates are a solo endeavor, the candidate alone on stage. And yet one thing this book makes clear is the collective nature of debates — briefing teams, squads of aides and lawyers to negotiate the terms of the encounter, makeup artists and spin doctors and even, in the case of Ronald Reagan, the first lady's astrologer (to vet the proposed dates).

In the media-saturated world of today, the candidate who can marshal the forces necessary to prevail is probably well suited to the demands of the job. That these are dispiriting conditions for the emergence of real leadership may be true, but is irrelevant to the matter at hand. The problem lies much deeper, and, as Schroeder points out in his conclusion, the debates succeed (and draw huge audiences) because "they speak to the nation in a language that is every American's second tongue: the language of television." ■

Evan Cornog is an associate dean at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and co-author, with Richard Whelan, of the recently published Hats in the Ring: An Illustrated History of American Presidential Campaigns.

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BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

EVERYTHING YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT POLITICS . . . AND WHY YOU'RE WRONG
By Kathleen Hall Jamieson
Basic Books. 287 pp. $15 paper

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, provides this list of what many Americans, including journalists, believe about American politics: "Soundbites are worthless. Politicians don't keep their promises. Campaigns are increasingly negative. Attack is the dominant form of campaign discourse. The public can't learn from campaigns because they are vapid and vacuous; debates contain no new information. Both advertising and attack drive voters from the polls. Newspapers have lost their impact." Jamieson and her associates challenge each of these axioms with enterprising — if unrelentingly quantitative — research. Even while casting a more favorable light on the country's political condition, they avoid overoptimism, suggesting merely that the American political system, with all its faults, is resilient and self-correcting. If anything is missing here, it is any awareness of the role of big money in national politics — a little like Moby Dick without the white whale.

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERARY JOURNALISM: THE EMERGENCE OF A MODERN NARRATIVE FORM
By John C. Hartsock
University of Massachusetts Press.
288 pp. $50; $17.95 paper

Hartsock, a former journalist and now a scholar based at SUNY, Cortland, provides a complex genealogy for an orphan form. Literary journalism is usually considered not literary enough for literati, not journalistic enough for journalists. But somehow the effort to create writing that offers both truth and a narrative has survived through centuries. Hartsock, perhaps stretching, finds its origins in Roman times. In American terms, he traces it through three flowerings — the century-ago age of such writers as Stephen Crane and John Reed; the 1930s, with, for example, John dos Passos and James Agee; and the "New Journalism" of the 1960s and 1970s, the glory days of Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Hunter Thompson, and kindred. Hartsock perceptively distinguishes literary journalism not only from workhorse "objective" newswriting but from journalistic sensationalism and muckraking. The other forms, he contends, set journalists at a safe distance from their subjects; literary journalists get close, even attempting to stand in the subjects' shoes. Today, he concludes, literary journalism as a genre remains marginalized, not least because the majority of schools of journalism and mass communication have excluded it from their curricula.

YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE YESTERDAY: A LIFE IN TELEVISION NEWS
By Garrick Utley
Public Affairs. 304 pp. $27.95

Garrick Utley has been a familiar face, and voice, since 1963 when, two years out of college, he hooked up with NBC News — which had employed his father, Clifton Utley — and remained there for thirty years. Reliable, energetic, clear, and concise, he covered more than his share of big and difficult stories without ever, it seems, attaining the household-name renown of network anchors. His memoir has the ingratiating qualities of his work on television (a CD-ROM of his outstanding reports accompanies the book). It is notably clear; it moves swiftly from point to point; it tells you the major facts. But it is also like a good television reporter's story — somewhat impersonal, and recalled in set scenes, as if his life were something he witnessed rather than experienced. He has had many adventures, but if he had personal crises or doubts, they are muted here.

STOPPING THE PRESSES: THE MURDER OF WALTER W. LIGGETT
By Marda Liggett Woodbury
University of Minnesota Press.
271 pp. $18.95

Minnesota in the 1930s was no placid Keillorland. Politicians and mobsters ran the state together, and woe to those who stood in their way. A ragtag alternative press tried to do the job of exposure that mainstream papers neglected. One editor, Jay M. Near, became the plaintiff in the landmark First Amendment case, *Near* v. *Minnesota*, when the authorities tried to suppress his paper. Two other editors were killed: Howard Guilford and the subject of this book, Walter W. Liggett. Liggett was a Minnesota native, a practicing radical; and his little newspapers were the fearless, even reckless, antagonists of bootleggers and corrupt officials. His daughter Marda and her mother were sitting in their parked car when Liggett was gunned down on December 9, 1935; a Minneapolis hoodlum was tried for the crime and quickly acquitted. Prepared for research by her career as a librarian, Marda Liggett Woodbury began to reinvestigate her father's murder in the 1980s and has produced this report, which tells as much, it seems, as can possibly be known about the crime without definitively solving it. It is worth reading, even when the tangles of Farmer-Labor party politics in Minnesota become murky, because it gives a lost martyr of the free press his place in history.

HOLDING THE MEDIA ACCOUNTABLE: CITIZENS, ETHICS, AND THE LAW
Edited by David Pritchard
Indiana University Press.
203 pp. $39.95; $16.95 paper

This modest volume, produced by scholars from a some-time-ago seminar at Indiana University, seeks to bring media law and ethics down from the planes of constitutional law and philosophy to the working level. One article exposes casual deceptions used in a television newsroom. Another finds that people who have complaints about news stories rarely actually complain. Another discovers, no surprise, is that many complaints to newspapers get lost or fumbled. Still another finds that a long-surviving local journalism review, in St. Louis, has little influence on journalistic practice — but even so, it appears, more influence than the national journalism reviews, if the journalists interviewed are to be believed.

James Boylan is founding editor of CJR *and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.*

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This study was produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, an affiliate of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. The study uses empirical data to measure the quality of local TV news and compare those results with ratings.

Time of Peril for TV News

Quality Sells, But Commitment — and Viewership — Continue to Erode

BY TOM ROSENSTIEL, CARL GOTTLIEB, AND LEE ANN BRADY

Local television news has reached a crossroad.

Viewers are beginning to abandon the medium, especially to the Internet, much as network news began to lose audience more than a decade ago with the advent of cable.

But in response the industry is headed toward making a fateful mistake.

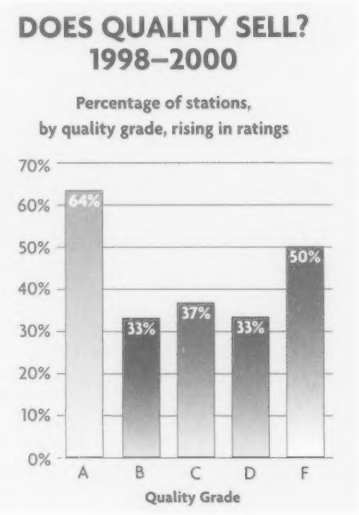
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CAMPAIGN 2000

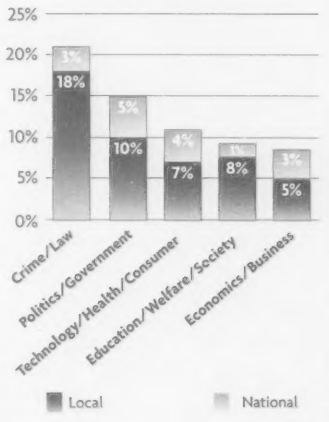
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TOP FIVE LOCAL NEWS TOPICS IN 2000

Percentage of stories by broad topic category



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Time of Peril for TV News

Quality Sells, But Commitment — and Viewership — Continue to Erode

BY TOM ROSENSTIEL, CARL GOTTLIEB, AND LEE ANN BRADY

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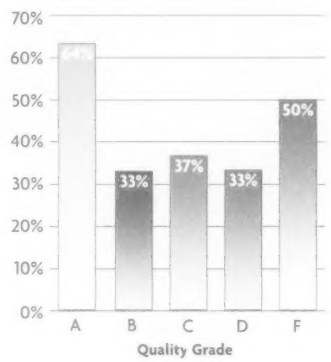
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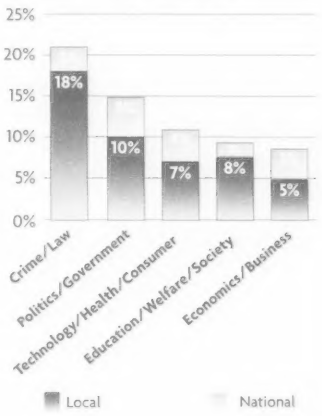
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Some eschew crime; others thrive on it. Some favor live, breaking stories; others are more cerebral, relying on lengthy packages. Some are unadorned and straightforward; others are fast-action tabloids, replete with video effects and audio swooshes.

At WXIA in Atlanta, the lead story may be the baseball pitcher John Rocker's return to face hostile crowds in New York City. In the 6 o'clock news at Tucson's KGUN, it's a big snowstorm. At action-packed WNYW in New York, it's a gunman ambushing firefighters. These stories reflect profoundly different news philosophies, but each one is consistent with the overall tone and approach of the newscast it leads. In each case, strong storytelling, technical excellence and consistency of tone combine to tell the viewer: "This is a station that knows what it's doing and does it well."

At one end of the spectrum, WNYW's anchors and reporters share a tough, wry, no-BS style that feels very New York. The station is heavy on crime and heavy on live, but the crime stories are intrinsically interesting and high-profile, not the meaningless accidents and fires that pass for news on too many stations.

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At the unadorned end of the spectrum stand KGUN and Chicago's WBBM, two serious newscasts that explore issues in depth. Carol Marin, WBBM's solo anchor, whom design team member Jim Snyder calls "one of the brightest anchorwomen in the country," helped to shape the 10 o'clock news's retro format. WBBM sets out to provide context for the day's events, with as many as three long debriefs a newscast between Marin and a reporter or a guest. It's a noble experiment, incorporating excellent coverage from WBBM's veteran reporters. But there is a thin line between virtue and sanctimony, and too often WBBM seems to boast, "Look, Ma, I'm being serious and important!"

Meanwhile, KGUN made a commitment to an important story without bogging the newscast down with long, taped "packages." Coverage of a February snowstorm moved deftly from live reports to a weathercast, anchor reads and a reporter on a virtual set. KGUN's anchors are engaging and authoritative, with flashes of humor, but you sense they feel they are less important than the stories. Weather tools like satellite imagery are used to tell the story, not to hype the brand.

It was encouraging to see how many of the top-scoring shows made education an important part of their coverage. Good consumer reporting (not cheesy formula alerts) was also evident. Another welcome characteristic is a willingness to encourage viewer comments and criticism, and to fess up when newscasts did wrong.

Dan Rosenheim is News Director at KPIX in San Francisco.

either feeds from elsewhere or are covered with video but no reporter. That has doubled since 1998, and is up 30% from a year ago.

The percentage of original investigative reporting, already tiny, is vanishing. Out of nearly 4,000 stories studied this year, only 0.9%, just 36 stories, were investigative pieces.

The percentage of tough interviewing on camera, which was also only three percent of all stories in 1998, has dropped to less than one percent over two years. Out of those 4,000 stories we watched this year, we found only 30 that included substantive questioning of sources on camera.

The commitment to covering breaking news, which requires a lesser but still notable level of effort, has leveled off at one in five stations, but it is still down 27% since 1998. This is ironic, given that local TV news considers breaking news its strength. Consider the classic promo, "Live, Local and Late Breaking."

And feed material — stories like, say, the heartwarming rescue of an elk from an ice floe in Latvia — is on the rise. Last year 20% of stories came from out-of-town feeds. This year the figure is up to 24%.

The trend seems to be true across the board — at high-quality stations rising in ratings, at low-quality stations dropping in ratings and everywhere in between.

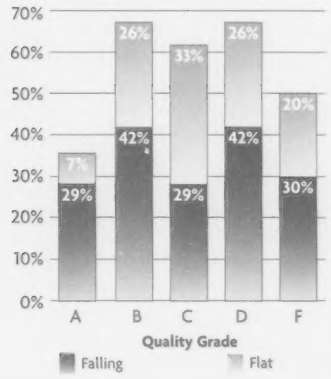
Why? The most obvious answer is that it's cheaper to down-link, or download, a story from your network or feed service than it is to field a team of your own reporters.

The problem is, the data suggest, that using more out-of-town feeds is a business model that bows to short-term gain rather than building long-term audience loyalty.

Last year we discovered that another likely factor in the decline of enterprise was that newsroom finances were being squeezed, especially by forcing stations to fill more airtime without commensurate budget increases. That pressure is only likely to continue if the industry sees a rash of further mergers, in which companies pay premiums for station groups and then have to increase profitability to service the debt or justify the price. In an environment in which most

STATIONS GOING NOWHERE: 1998–2000

Percentage of stations flat or falling in ratings, by quality grade



stations are seeing declining ratings, budget increases are even more unlikely.

If audiences genuinely respond to a station covering more of the community, working harder to source stories well and reporting with balance, the industry's refusal to provide its viewers with well-researched stories will lead it down a suicidal path.

TOPIC RANGE

Three years ago our design team of local TV news professionals told us that the most important mission for a newscast was to cover the entire community. The obligation — and what viewers wanted — was a full picture of the life of a place each day, from murders to museum exhibits, from fires to finance.

This might seem to run counter to the idea of targeting newscasts for the most appealing audiences, such as women and youth, and skipping unpopular topics, such as politics.

But the data suggest that targeting is a mistake. Viewers, it turns out, like breadth.

This year, stations with rising ratings covered notably more of their communities — about 10% more, according to our formula — than those whose ratings were falling.

The better a station does at covering the full spectrum of news and events in its community — and not ignoring certain topics because they're difficult or unpopular — the more likely the station is to be gaining in ratings.

This same finding, at a slightly less pronounced rate, holds true over three years.

STORY LENGTH

The deepening discovery that viewers like breadth is matched by the finding over three years that people like depth.

Many stations try to create the illusion that they are covering the whole community by jamming more stories into the broadcast, like KNXV in Phoenix, which crams 27 stories, on average, into the usual 13 minutes of general news — about a story every 30 seconds.

But viewers hate it, and KNXV's ratings are heading south. The data suggest that viewers like stations that air more long stories and minimize the number of very short stories.

- At stations building ratings, 37% of stories are a minute or longer. At stations falling in ratings, the figure is 24%.
- At stations rising in ratings, just 39% of stories are 30 seconds or shorter. At stations falling in ratings, 55% are.
- And stations losing ratings air almost twice as many super-short stories, less than twenty seconds long.

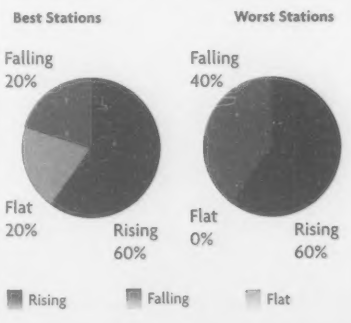
This finding, that viewers like depth and context, is not new. We found the same thing in our first year, and, to a lesser degree, in our second year. We will continue to watch. But over three years, the implication is getting clearer: too many short stories don't provide the information or context viewers want. Regardless of the style of a broadcast, viewers want a significant number of stories to be long.

This may, ironically, explain why the famous experiment at Chicago's WBBM, in which the newscaster Carol Marin produced a so-called serious newscast, hasn't succeeded. The station tended to run a lot of very long stories — 27% were over two minutes. But it also tended to run a lot of very short stories — nearly half were 30 seconds or less — and it aired more stories each night than most newscasts. Rather than provide a lot of news in some depth, in other words, WBBM gave viewers a great deal about a few things and gave short shrift to almost everything else.

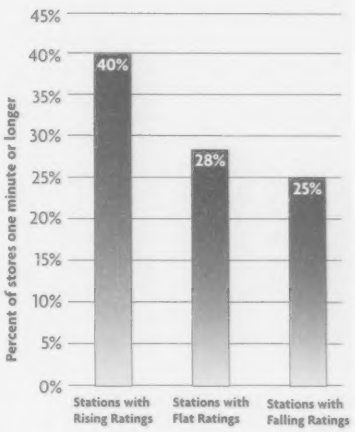
The lesson of WBBM's difficulties may not be that people don't like depth. To the contrary, they don't like depth across the board sacrificed for the sake of just a few stories a night.

BEST AND WORST STATIONS IN 2000

Percentage of top and bottom ten stations, in quality, by ratings trend



LONGER STORIES BUILD RATINGS



WHAT IS QUALITY

Our definition of quality is the same established by our design team of local TV news professionals three years ago (see **Design Team**). We stress the basics: A newscast should reflect its entire community, cover a broad range of topics, focus on the significant aspects of stories, be locally relevant, balance stories with multiple points of view, and use authoritative sources.

We continue to use the system developed by separate teams of university scholars and professional researchers to grade newscasts by a point system matched to these criteria (see **Who Did the Study**). As in years past presentation is a very minor factor. So that grading can be accomplished objectively, stories score well based on an accumulation of the simple journalistic values mentioned above.

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"I like the way live shots are produced on these newscasts," says Main. "It has the effect of seamlessness and keeps me interested." Jim Snyder's comment: "I was shocked to see how stodgy and predictable the KTVU show I saw was."

At the unadorned end of the spectrum stand KGUN and Chicago's WBBM, two serious newscasts that explore issues in depth. Carol Marin, WBBM's solo anchor, whom design team member Jim Snyder calls "one of the brightest anchorwomen in the country," helped to shape the 10 o'clock news's retro format. WBBM sets out to provide context for the day's events, with as many as three long debriefs a newscast between Marin and a reporter or a guest. It's a noble experiment, incorporating excellent coverage from WBBM's veteran reporters. But there is a thin line between virtue and sanctimony, and too often WBBM seems to boast, "Look, Ma, I'm being serious and important!"

Meanwhile, KGUN made a commitment to an important story without bogging the newscast down with long, taped "packages." Coverage of a February snowstorm moved deftly from live reports to a weathercast, anchor reads and a reporter on a virtual set. KGUN's anchors are engaging and authoritative, with flashes of humor, but you sense they feel they are less important than the stories. Weather tools like satellite imagery are used to tell the story, not to hype the brand.

It was encouraging to see how many of the top-scoring shows made education an important part of their coverage. Good consumer reporting (not cheesy formula alerts) was also evident. Another welcome characteristic is a willingness to encourage viewer comments and criticism, and to fess up when newscasts did wrong.

Dan Rosenheim is News Director at KPIX in San Francisco.

either feeds from elsewhere or are covered with video but no reporter. That has doubled since 1998, and is up 30% from a year ago.

The percentage of original investigative reporting, already tiny, is vanishing. Out of nearly 4,000 stories studied this year, only 0.9%, just 36 stories, were investigative pieces.

The percentage of tough interviewing on camera, which was also only three percent of all stories in 1998, has dropped to less than one percent over two years. Out of those 4,000 stories we watched this year, we found only 30 that included substantive questioning of sources on camera.

The commitment to covering breaking news, which requires a lesser but still notable level of effort, has leveled off at one in five stations, but it is still down 27% since 1998. This is ironic, given that local TV news considers breaking news its strength. Consider the classic promo, "Live, Local and Late Breaking."

And feed material — stories like, say, the heartwarming rescue of an elk from an ice floe in Latvia — is on the rise. Last year 20% of stories came from out-of-town feeds. This year the figure is up to 24%.

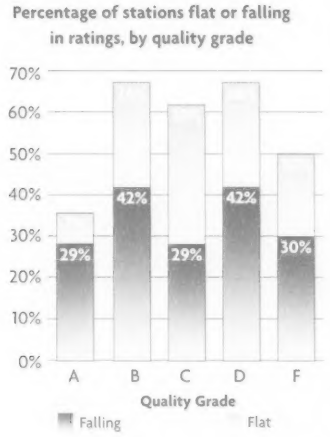
The trend seems to be true across the board — at high-quality stations rising in ratings, at low-quality stations dropping in ratings and everywhere in between.

Why? The most obvious answer is that it's cheaper to down-link, or download, a story from your network or feed service than it is to field a team of your own reporters.

The problem is, the data suggest, that using more out-of-town feeds is a business model that bows to short-term gain rather than building long-term audience loyalty.

Last year we discovered that another likely factor in the decline of enterprise was that newsroom finances were being squeezed, especially by forcing stations to fill more airtime without commensurate budget increases. That pressure is only likely to continue if the industry sees a rash of further mergers, in which companies pay premiums for station groups and then have to increase profitability to service the debt or justify the price. In an environment in which most

STATIONS GOING NOWHERE: 1998–2000



stations are seeing declining ratings, budget increases are even more unlikely.

If audiences genuinely respond to a station covering more of the community, working harder to source stories well and reporting with balance, the industry's refusal to provide its viewers with well-researched stories will lead it down a suicidal path.

TOPIC RANGE

Three years ago our design team of local TV news professionals told us that the most important mission for a newscast was to cover the entire community. The obligation — and what viewers wanted — was a full picture of the life of a place each day, from murders to museum exhibits, from fires to finance.

This might seem to run counter to the idea of targeting newscasts for the most appealing audiences, such as women and youth, and skipping unpopular topics, such as politics.

But the data suggest that targeting is a mistake. Viewers, it turns out, like breadth.

This year, stations with rising ratings covered notably more of their communities — about 10% more, according to our formula — than those whose ratings were falling.

The better a station does at covering the full spectrum of news and events in its community — and not ignoring certain topics because they're difficult or unpopular — the more likely the station is to be gaining in ratings.

This same finding, at a slightly less pronounced rate, holds true over three years.

STORY LENGTH

The deepening discovery that viewers like breadth is matched by the finding over three years that people like depth.

Many stations try to create the illusion that they are covering the whole community by jamming more stories into the broadcast, like KNXV in Phoenix, which crams 27 stories, on average, into the usual 13 minutes of general news — about a story every 30 seconds.

But viewers hate it, and KNXV's ratings are heading south. The data suggest that viewers like stations that air more long stories and minimize the number of very short stories.

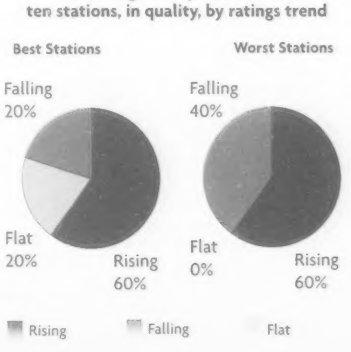
- At stations building ratings, 37% of stories are a minute or longer. At stations falling in ratings, the figure is 24%.
- At stations rising in ratings, just 39% of stories are 30 seconds or shorter. At stations falling in ratings, 55% are.
- And stations losing ratings air almost twice as many super-short stories, less than twenty seconds long.

This finding, that viewers like depth and context, is not new. We found the same thing in our first year, and, to a lesser degree, in our second year. We will continue to watch. But over three years, the implication is getting clearer: too many short stories don't provide the information or context viewers want. Regardless of the style of a broadcast, viewers want a significant number of stories to be long.

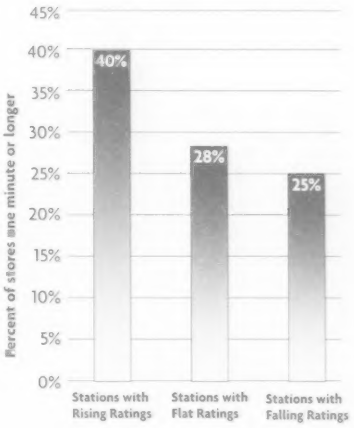
This may, ironically, explain why the famous experiment at Chicago's WBBM, in which the newscaster Carol Marin produced a so-called serious newscast, hasn't succeeded. The station tended to run a lot of very long stories — 27% were over two minutes. But it also tended to run a lot of very short stories — nearly half were 30 seconds or less — and it aired more stories each night than most newscasts. Rather than provide a lot of news in some depth, in other words, WBBM gave viewers a great deal about a few things and gave short shrift to almost everything else.

The lesson of WBBM's difficulties may not be that people don't like depth. To the contrary, they don't like depth across the board sacrificed for the sake of just a few stories a night.

BEST AND WORST STATIONS IN 2000



LONGER STORIES BUILD RATINGS



WHAT IS QUALITY

Our definition of quality is the same established by our design team of local TV news professionals three years ago (see **Design Team**). We stress the basics: A newscast should reflect its entire community, cover a broad range of topics, focus on the significant aspects of stories, be locally relevant, balance stories with multiple points of view, and use authoritative sources.

We continue to use the system developed by separate teams of university scholars and professional researchers to grade newscasts by a point system matched to these criteria (see **Who Did the Study**). As in years past presentation is a very minor factor. So that grading can be accomplished objectively, stories score well based on an accumulation of the simple journalistic values mentioned above.

In this third year of the Local TV News Project we also continue to correlate a station's quality scores to Nielsen Media Research household ratings that encompass a three-year period beginning in May 1997 and ending in February 2000.

This year, as in years past, we have examined the most watched half-hours of news in a core group of cities randomly selected after ensuring population and geographic balance. We have also looked at early-evening news in Atlanta and Los Angeles, markets where we previously studied late news.

A year ago we found that the six o'clock news programs in New York and Boston scored much better than their 11 P.M. counterparts. The same holds true this year. In Atlanta, the early evening news broadcasts scored an average 144 points higher than the late news broadcasts we studied in 1998. In Los Angeles, the six o'clock broadcasts were 57 points higher.

Over three years we've found that, contrary to newsroom lore and the claims of critics, all local news is not the same. Our best station in the most watched time slot, Tucson's KGUN, scored 291 points more than our worst station, KNXV in Phoenix.

The same is true of the time slots we added this year. The best in the morning, WGME of Portland, Maine, scored 145 points higher than the morning's worst, WBRC of Birmingham. Oakland's KTVU, the best of the prime-time hour-long newscasts, earned a whopping 292 points more than Los Angeles's KTLA.

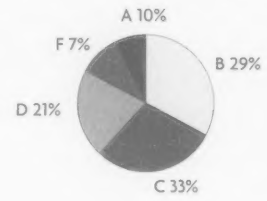
QUALITY VERSUS RATINGS

How sure are we that quality is the best path to ratings? Eight of the ten best stations we studied this year were either going up in ratings (60%) or at least holding their own (20%). Put in another way, if you practice basic good journalism, as defined by our design team of industry professionals, your station is four times as likely to be gaining or holding ratings as losing. In a television environment that has steadily decreased in viewers, hanging on is not the worst thing in the world.

It's riskier to be a bottom-ten station in this study. While 6 out of 10 stations on the bottom have positive ratings trends, four are clearly failing. Unlike the better stations, there is no holding your ground here. It's either up or down.

PERCENTAGE OF STATIONS BY GRADE, 1998-2000

Total number of high-rated newscasts studied = 146



MAGIC FORMULA

Is there a special recipe for building ratings? The data show there are some key elements — across all stations and across all years — that we can now say are key steps in serving viewers. Interestingly, they are also steps to quality. Two we've outlined above:

- Cover more of the community.
- Produce more longer stories and fewer very short stories.

In addition, four other key steps to building ratings are clear from the data over three years:

- Focus more stories around the major public and private institutions in town.
- Do fewer stories targeted at demographic subsets of your audience.
- Use fewer sources who are anonymous or referred to only in passing.
- Send a reporter, not just a camera crew, to cover stories. Viewers seem to prefer hearing the latest events from reporters on the scene rather than listening to anchors providing voiceovers for canned footage.

Other steps build ratings, depending on which style of news a station wants to pursue — high quality or more racy tabloid.

Each year we have broken good stations from the most popular time slot in each city into two groups: "Master" stations are those with high quality (A or B grades) and rising ratings (one or two up arrows). "Earnest" stations have A or B grades and declining ratings (down arrows; charts, pp. 89, 90-92).

In addition to the six ideas above, master stations over three years share these other qualities. They:

- Air fewer crime stories.
- Air more local stories.
- Do more investigative work, news series and tough interviews.
- Use less feed material.
- Air more person-on-the street interviews.
- Do less horse-race-style political coverage.

As we have already pointed out, stations can use a "down-market" strategy to seize viewers' attention and win their loyalty. But our data on audience retention shows that across the board, low-quality stations lose viewers from their lead-in, while our best stations were more likely to be keeping viewers over time. The down-market approach may work, but it may not have as much staying power.

Another interesting discovery over three years is that there seem to be no set criteria for winning ratings using a down-market approach.

Except for the things that help any station win ratings — like doing more long stories and using fewer anonymous sources — we can find no common characteristics among the down-market stations with rising ratings that hold over three years.

The implication is that the success of the tabloid approach is somewhat haphazard.

We can identify reliable ways to build ratings with quality. We cannot over three years quantify reliable ways to build ratings with a tabloid or low-quality approach.

THREE-YEAR MARKETS

We have studied thirteen stations now for three years. In general, these stations have become more locally relevant and now cover more of their communities than they did three years ago. Most have also shown notable improvement in giving different points of view in their stories. One of the most disturbing findings all along in this study, and one that has bothered practitioners, has been the one-sidedness of so much of the news. Whether these improvements are the result of being scrutinized we have no idea.

But the commonalities end there. Some stations have improved and begun to gain market share, like Minneapolis's WCCO. Some have slipped in quality and viewers, like Minneapolis's KARE. And some have both improved in quality and lost in viewers, like New York's WABC.

There is one other generalization we can make. Ratings for these stations

over a five-year trend show what every general manager already knows. Most of these stations, like local TV news in general, are seeing their audience shrink.

CONCLUSION

The future of local TV news is not pretty. Of the 178 stations we have studied, 128, or 72%, have experienced overall ratings declines over three years. Twenty-six percent have added viewers. Two percent are flat.

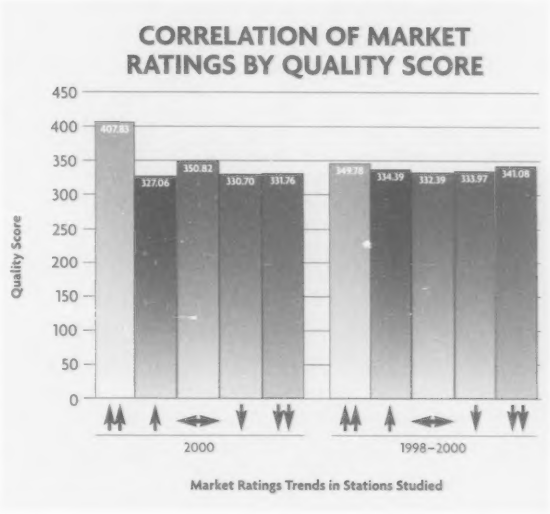
At the Radio-TV News Directors Association convention this year, news professionals were already saying that young people find little worth watching in local TV news. Those discussions are borne out by data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press that show young people abandoning local television news in favor of the Internet. TV is suffering the loss more than other news media.

This year, as part of the project, we co-sponsored a survey with our affiliate NewsLab of people who watch little TV news. Of the many reasons, including being too busy or not home, 70% had to do with substantive complaints about content, particularly that local TV news covered too few topics and was too superficial and too repetitive.

"Avoidance of local news has doubled in the past ten years," the TV news consultant Scott Tallal of Insite Research has found. One reason: "More than half of those surveyed feel that most stations spend too much time covering the same stories over and over again."

Three years of data in our study show viewers are right. Enterprise is vanishing. Programs are getting thinner. Stations are targeting their newscasts at demographic groups based on artificial and frankly insulting stereotypes. A whole range of what people expect from journalism — like helping the disadvantaged or being a watchdog over the powerful — is ignored.

The fact is that many of the conventional ideas about what works in TV news — high story count, flashy production, emotion over substance, targeting — are demonstrably wrong.



These false ideas are driven by outdated beliefs and by following the interests of advertisers rather than viewers. They're reinforced by audience research often based on poorly conceived or even misused surveys and focus groups. And they are institutionalized by short-sighted profit demands that force news directors to cut the very things that build viewership over time — such as enterprise reporting and building staff.

And now those demands are prompting newscasters to sell out their independence to advertisers.

The numbers make clear a frightening prospect: most stations are selling off their future.

But the data also show a way out. Enterprise sells. Depth sells. Breadth sells. Courage sells. The problem is there is not enough of those things in local TV news, and they're getting scarcer.

If the industry does not begin soon to change, if it continues to insist on profit margins that can be sustained only by gutting newsrooms, the evidence strongly suggests the biggest loser in the Internet revolution will not be newspapers but local broadcast television news.

If so, broadcasters will have only themselves to blame.

Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, is a former media critic for the Los Angeles Times and Washington correspondent for Newsweek. Carl Gottlieb, the Project's deputy director, is a former broadcast news executive with the Tribune Co. and Fox. Lee Ann Brady is senior project director at Princeton Survey Research Associates, one of the nation's leading news-media research firms.

WHO DID THE STUDY

This study was conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, a journalists'group in Washington, D.C., affiliated with the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The scholar team that developed the methodology included Lee Ann Brady of Princeton Survey Research Associates; Marion Just, Ph.D., Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College; Michael Robinson, Ph.D., formerly of Georgetown University; Ann Crigler, Ph.D., Director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, and Sherrie Mazingo, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota. Todd Belt of USC measured the ratings trends. Evan Jenkins edited the articles. Researchers at Princeton Survey Research Associates coded the newscasts and prepared the initial statistical data under the supervision of Brady. Abigail Sturges designed the layout and graphics. Atiba Pertilla and Chris Galdieri of PEJ were the project researchers.

DESIGN TEAM

The following local news professionals developed the criteria of quality for this study and signed off on major decisions:

John Cardenas, News Director, WBNS, Columbus, Ohio.
John Corporon, Board of Governors, Overseas Press Club.
Randy Covington, News Director, WIS TV, Columbia, S. C.
Marty Haag, Vice President, Audience Research & Development.
Natalie Jacobson, Principal Anchor, WCVB TV, Boston.
Alice Main, former Executive Producer, WLS TV, Chicago.
Gordon Peterson, Principal Anchor, WUSA TV, Washington, D.C.
Jose Rios, Vice President of News, KTTV, Los Angeles.
Dan Rosenheim, News Director, KPIX TV, San Francisco.
Jim Snyder, Retired Vice President of News, Post Newsweek Stations.
Kathy Williams, News Director, WKYC TV, Cleveland.
Gary Wordlaw, President and General Manager, WTVH TV, Syracuse.

LOCAL TV NEWS

Quality Grade / Ratings Trend	Station	Quality Score	Network Affiliation	Average Points per Story	Topic Range	Focus	Enterprise	Source Expertise	No. of Sources	Viewpoints	Local Relevance	Comments
HIGHEST RATED TIMESLOTS												
BOSTON												
C ↑	WBZ*	352.30	CBS	20.70								Best in Boston dropped to C from B. Good localism. Ratings on the right track.
C ↔	WHDH*	311.31	NBC	19.89								Racy presentation, but most issues in town. Good at breaking news, sourcing. Could be more local. Up from "D" to "C" in a year.
D ↓↓	WCVB*	264.49	ABC	19.07								A year of change at a station known for stability. Highest story count at 11. Weakest sourcing in town.
DENVER												
B ↓↓	KUSA	378.18	NBC	22.72								Best in Denver shows ratings weakness. More breaking news, coverage of civic institutions would help.
B ↔	KMGH	369.81	ABC	22.66								Decent station slipping in ratings. Best in Denver at sourcing, breaking news. Needs more localism.
D ↓↓	KCNC	304.10	CBS	20.97								Highest story count, most local coverage in town. Low on ideas/issues. Too many unnamed sources.
MINNEAPOLIS												
B ↓	KSTP*	363.28	ABC	21.04								Best half-hour in town. Lots of crime, investigations. Makes national stories local. Could improve sourcing.
C ↓↓	KARE*	331.59	NBC	20.36								Down a grade from last year, ratings follow. Good sourcing, least local coverage.
C ↑	WCCO*	331.12	CBS	20.75								B last year. Best sourcing, investigations at 10. Strong breaking news, could be more local.
D ↑	KMSP*	277.76	UPN	20.45								Is this the same station that airs the one-hour show? Lots of feeds, horse-race politics.
NEW YORK												
B ↓↓	WABC*	365.27	ABC	22.83								From worst to first in NY. Best half-hour in town for issues, investigations, sources. Light on breaking news. This is Eyewitness News?
B ↓	WNBC*	357.63	NBC	22.37								Solid station. Bouncing back at 11 p.m. Good expert sources, mix of opinions. Could be more local.
C ↑	WCBS*	348.91	CBS	22.31								Improving, but long way to go. No investigations, lots of everyday incidents.
PHOENIX												
A ↑	KTVK	406.53	IND.	22.50								Best in Phoenix. Most investigations, expert sources. Half the national average for unnamed sources. Stories really well done.
B ↔	KPHO	398.21	CBS	21.37								Almost an A. Big on breaking news and horse-race politics. Coverage too one-sided.
B ↑	KPNX	371.07	NBC	22.09								Good station in ratings war. Best at breaking news. Makes national news locally relevant.
F ↓	KNXV	199.51	ABC	19.30								Lowest score in three years. Lots of stories, no depth. Promos: "We won't waste your time." They do.

CHART KEY

Overall Grade
A = 400.75 or higher
B = 353.23 – 400.74
C = 305.72 – 353.22
D = 258.20 – 305.71
F = 210.69 – 258.19

Ratings (3 years):
= sharply up
= up
= flat
= down
= sharply down

Icons: Average story score for a station by variable.
= highest score
= second highest score
= mid-range score
= second lowest score
= lowest score
* = also studied 1998 and 1999

Quality Grade	Ratings Trend	Station	Quality Score	Network Affiliation	Average Points per Story	Topic Range	Focus	Enterprise	Source Expertise	No. of Sources	Viewpoints	Local Relevance	Comments
SIOUX FALLS													
C	↓↓	KELO	321.53	CBS	20.49								Ratings slippage despite monster tune-in. Covers state well, but too many stories with no sources.
C	↓↓	KSFY	314.82	ABC	18.95								Too many unnamed sources, one-source stories. Not much breaking news or issues. Ratings loser.
D	↑	KDLT	302.88	NBC	20.12								Last place but climbing. Lots of news conferences. Best in town for issues. Covers Sioux Falls and its institutions.
TUCSON													
A	↑↑	KGUN	490.38	ABC	25.48								Does it all. Longest stories. Lots of investigations. Good at breaking news. No unsourced stories. Building ratings.
B	→	KOLD	398.68	CBS	22.22								Almost an A. Ratings cold. Needs investigations, more breaking news. Broad coverage of Tucson.
B	↓↓	KVOA	394.44	NBC	21.75								Longtime market leader, good station challenged. 40% news conferences. Many one-source stories.
WICHITA													
B	↑	KAKE*	386.22	ABC	19.88								Slipping score, decent ratings. Good sourcing. Lots of person-in-the-street interviews. Could improve breaking news.
C	↓	KSNW*	325.37	NBC	21.27								Superficial, no investigations or tough interviews. Good expert sourcing and regional coverage.
D	↓↓	KWCH*	275.12	CBS	20.74								Longtime ratings leader halting slide. Only investigation in market. Low on expert sources.
FOLLOW-UP MARKETS													
ATLANTA													
A	↑↑	WXIA	439.25	NBC	22.78								Very local. Needs better sourcing, more balance, enterprise. News director promoted to WUSA.
B	→	WGCL	385.71	CBS	22.81								From "F" to "B" in two years; new ownership. Good on breaking news. Best in town for balance.
CHICAGO													
B	↓↓	WBBM	368.07	CBS	23.76								Carol Marin's experiment hasn't matured and may not get the chance to be a "survivor."
LOS ANGELES													
A	↓	KCBS	405.79	CBS	22.10								High on issues and ideas, low on crime. Covers L.A. well, could improve sourcing. Dismal ratings.
B	↓	KABC	356.35	ABC	22.30								Ratings king at 6. Very local, lots of human interest, breaking news. Good sourcing, low on ideas. Most investigations in L.A. Solid station.
D	↑	KNBC	278.55	NBC	20.34								Tabloid formula: lots of crime, unusual events, feeds. Poor sourcing, least local coverage.

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PRIMETIME HOURS													
ATLANTA													
C	↑	WAGA	326.25	FOX	20.86								Solid in other timeslots. Ratings hurt by declining Fox lead-in. Too many feeds. Good at ideas/issue stories.
LOS ANGELES													
C	→	KCOP	350.56	UPN	22.46								Best 10 p.m. in L.A. but loses UPN audience. Good sourcing, issues. Low on crime and high on series.
C	↑	KCAL	335.15	IND.	21.09								Decent expert sourcing, poor mix of opinions. Local, good on breaking events.
D	↓	KTTV	304.55	FOX	21.24								Just missed a C. Good sourcing, lots of crime. More localism would help. Fox lead-in hurts.
F	↑	KTLA	253.10		19.18								Worst in L.A. Proof that tabloid can succeed. But can you sell Hal Fishman to the Dawson's Creek crowd?
MINNEAPOLIS													
B	↑	KMSP	387.15	UPN	21.09								Second-best prime show in study. Lots of sources, mix of opinions. Low on crime, local institutions.
NEW YORK													
C	↓	WNYW	351.04	FOX	22.92								Just missed a B. Big on issues, breaking news, expert sources. Decent localism. Slipping in the ratings.
C	→	WPIX	320.77		21.85								Beats market/nation for mix of opinions. Most multiple sources. Least coverage of metro area.
C	↑	WWOR	313.90	UPN	21.43								Heavy ideas/issues, light on breaking news. Most investigations at 10p.m. Many feed stories.
SF/OAKLAND													
A	↑↑	KTVU	545.18	FOX	27.72								Best score ever in study. Twice national average for issues, experts, balance and relevance. Proof quality sells.
EARLY MORNING SHOWS													
BIRMINGHAM													
D	↑↑	WCFT	292.81		18.65								Surging in the morning. Best in town at mix of opinions, covers the market. Needs more breaking news.
D	↓	WVTM	262.60		17.09								News lite. Heavy human interest. No investigations. Over half of stories undisputed.
F	↑	WBRC	235.05	FOX	18.12								Longtime market leader holding its own. Heavy crime, breaking news and thin sourcing.
DETROIT													
C	↑↑	WJBK	337.70	FOX	19.15								Best in average market. Good use of experts, useful info, mix of opinions. Low on issues, breaking news. Ratings up.
C	→	WDIV	311.29		18.30								Tabloid in the morning. Poor sourcing. Local coverage. Lots of celebrities. OK on breaking news.
C	→	WXYZ	311.03		19.97								Confused. Good mix of opinions, localism, ideas/issues. Many unnamed sources.
PORTLAND													
B	↓	WGME	380.91		20.51								Best a.m. in study. Big on issues, feeds. Covers the market. Little breaking news.
C	↑↑	WCSH	341.64		19.04								Average broadcast, killer ratings. Above average for breaking news. Too many unnamed sources.

Brought to You By...

SPONSOR INTERFERENCE

BY MARION JUST AND ROSALIND LEVINE

At a time of growing concern about commercial influence in the news, there is new evidence that the problem of sponsor interference may be more widespread than many journalists realize.

A third of news directors surveyed in this year's local TV study report being pressured to kill negative stories, or do positive ones, about advertisers.

In many cases, perhaps most, the pressure is coming internally from station management.

We sent questionnaires to all 49 stations studied in this year's report and received responses from 25. While those numbers are small, the answers about sponsor interference are troubling.

A third of news directors answering the question said they "were discouraged or interfered with" editorially "because of concerns about sponsors."

One news director vividly described "strong internal pressure to drop negative stories or do positive ones" on a variety of topics including "consumer, investigative, and medical" news.

"Car stories" are especially vulnerable to sponsor pressure. In one incident, a station wanted to explore "complaints about the local car dealer," a news director reported. "We were told not to do this story [even] before we shot anything."

Two news directors said they were encouraged to cover stories about "station-sponsored" or "company events." One was pressured to cover "events where [the] station 'partners' with an advertiser."

Not all news departments succumbed. At least one news director reported that he was pressured to help advertisers, "but we say NO!"

The finding of widespread pressure within TV stations to slant the news both to protect and promote advertisers is part of a growing concern in the industry.

Last year's study found that more than two thirds of stations now run sponsored news segments, many where the sponsor has a commercial interest.

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway recently refused to let local stations send their own cameras to cover a major race, insisting that they air the highlights as edited by race organizers. Three out of four stations agreed. In another city, a local theme park wanted the weather report to say skies would be partly sunny, rather than partly cloudy, because it might encourage more visitors. The station declined.

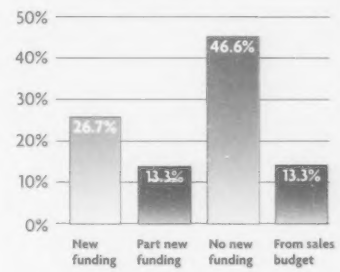
NEW MEDIA

The other major finding in this year's survey concerns the growth of the Internet. Every station responding to our survey now has a World Wide Web site.

However, forty-six percent said they were being given no new funds to finance their sites. The money had to come out of the existing newsroom budget.

In addition, at no station surveyed were any proceeds from the Web returned back to news. Only a few Web sites had turned a profit, and the amounts were small. Still, even in its infancy, the Web was expected to add immediately to the bottom line of the station.

FUNDING LOCAL NEWS WEB SITES



Fifteen stations responded

Most news directors thought the Web site was important enough to "assign full time staff to keep [the site] interactive and current," as one response put it, although others saw the Web primarily as a "complementary service to the newscast." The trend was to send television viewers to Web sites where they could follow either breaking news, or obtain "background information that can't be included on TV because of time limits" as one news director explained.

According to our survey the average number of Web updates was seven per day, but the range was considerable — from stations that only updated once a day to those that updated "constantly." The results seem encouraging. Stations reported a median of 400,000 visitors per month to their Web sites.

The great majority of stations provide weather for radio or other news programming. A like number provide news either for an affiliated broadcast or cable network.

The local news Web staff was small, averaging two persons per station. Likewise the budget investment was small ($15,000 to $200,000), averaging two percent of the budget.

When asked how to integrate new and old media, news directors agreed that mechanisms ought to be found to encourage communication between the staffs. News directors thought the Web should be "part of the daily news operation." Local news Web and newsroom staff should "work side by side." It was not clear, however, who should be in charge.

TALENT

Only a small number of stations in our survey were willing to detail how they allocated their budgets. Of those stations that did respond, we noted that the greater the percentage of budget spent for on-screen talent, the lower the station's quality scores — and the results are statistically highly significant.*

In other words, spending more on anchors at the expense of producers, writers, editors and camera crews tends to hurt quality.

What's more, contrary to conventional wisdom, we found no correlation between spending more on high-priced talent and building ratings.

*$p<.01$

Marion Just is a professor of political science at Wellesley College and a research associate at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard. Rosalind Levine is an attorney in Boston.

BUCKING THE TREND

Lessons for Thriving in a Declining Market

BY MARTY HAAG

Not long ago I came across an internal station memorandum from a local TV news operation that said: "We are an oasis in a sea of change." Perhaps that's the problem. We don't know what we are in local TV news anymore — even metaphorically. No question plagues television news executives more than the dimension of change when ratings are falling, station loyalties are eroding and technologies threaten the broad-based audience we once had. What will the newscast be like five years from today? As one who is contemplating retirement after more than thirty-five years in local television news, I see parallels to Reuven Frank's lament that network news pre-eminence, unlike the Roman Empire, didn't fall; it petered out. Is this happening to local television news?

In the roiling conditions of the 1980's, the strengths of network news fell away: appointment viewing went the way of the TV dinner. A cable news operation seemed able to respond to breaking news minutes before the networks could crank up. Local stations had the advantage of being local but also could bring in satellite feeds from anywhere.

Now, local television journalism is bombarded regularly with charges of being shallow, shoddy and crime-ridden. Many see local TV as irrelevant, particularly 18-to-24-year-olds and those comfortable with the Internet.

This year's results from the local television news study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism offer "benchmarks" for success in analyzing the products of four stations: KTVU in Oakland, KTVK in Phoenix, KGUN in Tucson and WXIA in Atlanta. All four stations earned "A" grades in the study and have been enjoying ratings success for the past three years. Once again, the PEJ study holds out hope that leaders with higher ideals than the cast of "Survivor" will preserve the core of excellent journalism while accommodating change.



News Director Andrew Finlayson

In the light of the setting afternoon sun, the view from the KTVU newsroom in Oakland — the bay, the sailboats, the bridge (not that one, the other one) and the towering skyline of San Francisco — is spectacular. It's not bad on the inside either. KTVU, Channel 2, earned the highest marks in this year's PEJ local news study and scored more than 100 points above the next-best station.

The source of the station's excellence is no mystery. The architect of Channel 2's product, Fred Zehnder, was in charge for 20 years as news director before retiring last year. The general manager, Kevin O'Brien, has been leading his troops for more than 14 years. The lead news anchor, Dennis Richmond, has had the title since 1976. "Most of the people here have lived and worked in the Bay Area for years," says the current news director, Andrew Finlayson, "and they know where Point Richmond is, and they know the institutions of the area. They have experience that you can't buy." When Finlayson gets audition tapes, they are put in two stacks — those who have lived and worked in Northern California and those who haven't.

The breakdown of what KTVU, a Fox affiliate, puts on the air tells us much. The station aired few crime stories. A relatively high percentage (13.3%) of the hour-long broadcast's stories were about economics and business. KTVU has two business reporters, one for morning, one for evening, and one of them is the nationally syndicated expert Brian Banmiller. Another reporter, Randy Shandobil, does politics exclusively. Finlayson points out that a question about political coverage probably wouldn't get enthusiastic response from a focus group, but in the hands of a talented writer, the results might differ. KTVU stories are long, averaging between two and three minutes. More than half the stories used three or more sources. With metronome precision, the "number one prime time news in the country," as the station describes itself, ticks off the day's top stories in more than ample detail: first, hackers hitting eBay; next, new details on an airplane crash, an exclusive local story; then, a Bush primary win. One senses that a viewer seeing the next morning's paper would think to himself, "knew that, knew that, knew that," and so on.

"Fred preached one thing over and over," Finlayson says of Zehnder, "and that was to give time to all of the communities of the Bay Area. We have more voices; we speak to all communities. We don't just aim for the BMW demographic."

There is one other thing. KTVU doesn't have a helicopter or satellite newsgathering truck.

"We couldn't cover a car chase even if we wanted to," Finlayson crows. Thus Lesson Number One: It's about people.

Moving east from the Bay Area, the next top-scoring station in the study this year was KTVK, Channel 3, the market leader for news in Phoenix. I have a confession to make here: This is a Belo station. Still, there are lessons to be learned from



News Director Phil Alvidrez

KTVK's success: Know your market, stake out a clearly defined direction, and don't fear being "out there." And, of course, an outstanding, stable management team helps. When Bill Miller left another Phoenix station to run KTVK nearly 15 years ago, he assembled a talented behind-the-scenes team — including Phil Alvidrez and Dennis O'Neil, who run the news division, and Sue Schwartz, who succeeded Miller this year as general manager. The group has proved it has a talent for entrepreneurship. In January 1995, ABC yanked the station's affiliation, making Channel 3 a pure independent. Fearing that loss of network status would relegate the station to secondary status in the viewer's mind, Miller and his crew labeled KTVK "the place with more stuff." The logo was a jiggling TV set with rabbit ears.

The station has been criticized for little coverage of issues and "lots of frothy news" by the *Arizona Republic's* TV critic, Steve Wilson. PEJ's study found an unusually low percentage of stories (3.3%) that focused on ideas, issues or policies. And only 3.3% of the content resulted from station-initiated investigations. Breaking news rules. More than a third (37.4%) of the stories in the newscasts surveyed were responses to spontaneous events. About a third of the stories were about crime. Understandably, there are more national stories and longer stories in a typical KTVK newscast; the station does eight hours of news a day Monday through Friday.

In a 6 p.m. broadcast screened for this article, uniqueness abounds. The photography is inventive. Lower-third supers are rainbow colors and in script. The consumer segment is labeled "Consumer Stuff." The helicopter pilot/reporter is a bona fide star.

The late news at 10 p.m. was recently expanded to one hour and labeled "The NewShow." Here again, except for another in Alvidrez's collection of attractive anchor people, convention is thrown to the wind. The single anchor stands in a tiny studio next to a TV monitor and flits through an hour by herself, veering from a hard-news story to a live-shot feature and back. It is as if the broadcast were formatted with the aid of a dart board. But it works. Not only is it fun, it is informative. This baby is niched. Lesson Number Two: At a time when we are told all newscasts appear alike, difference can matter. Don't be a commodity. Could you replicate KTVK in another market? Maybe not.



News Director Forrest Carr

According to one researcher, only one station in the country has improved its rank order in news and held that position for three ratings periods without a significant change in lead-in. That hasn't happened in Tucson yet either, but a significant change is in the wind. KGUN's 6 p.m. newscast took over first place in July. Three years ago, KGUN, Channel 9, did not have a 6 p.m. broadcast and the 5 p.m. trailed by 12 rating points.

The reason for the new 6 p.m.'s success may be found on the tapes from the early March recording period. The station sends a reporter to nearby Mt. Lemmon to cover the snowfall but also to report the impact on water rationing; a full-screen graphic or an over-the-shoulder box conveys important information. Sen. John McCain withdraws from the presidential race. School closings are revealed, as is information on a Salvation Army coat drive. This broadcast fulfills the expectations of 6 p.m. news as a local news broadcast of record. The results from Super Tuesday are reported with remarks from a local campaign coordinator. In succeeding days, the news department turns to a story on the first-ever online voting in Arizona, and the effect of the snowfall on the poor section of Nogales, just across the border in Mexico.

KGUN, an ABC affiliate, was far above average in stories on ideas, issues and policy. In fact, at 22.2%, it was twice the average. The essential element in KGUN's turnaround, according to the voluble news director, Forrest Carr, is a concerted effort to connect with the viewers. The station has a "Viewers' Bill of Rights" which is "a public statement of principles," Carr says, "and in the Viewers' Representative, or ombudsman, we have their representative in the newsroom who covers reaction to our news coverage decisions once a week." So passionate is Carr's belief in reflecting community values that he is often criticized for being "holier than thou."

Carr says, "I admit to being a crusader, and journalists aren't supposed to be crusaders." Carr has adopted rules for covering crime like those promulgated several years ago at KVUE-TV in Austin by the late Carole Kneeland. Like KVUE, the station declares that it "will not stalk innocent victims of tragedy or crime." Lesson Number Three: Have a vision and pursue it passionately.



News Director Dave Roberts

The fourth benchmark selection is the Gannett-owned station in the highly-competitive Atlanta market, WXIA-TV. Two strong stations, WSB-TV and WAGA-TV, were not included in this year's study because the Project does not measure one-hour broadcasts against half-hours, like WXIA, in the same time slot. At 6 p.m., nearly a third of the stories on WXIA were about crime, and all of them were about local crime. In fact, only one other station, KCAL in Los Angeles, covers more crime, but WXIA, Channel 11, seemed to stand out by providing a balance of sources and providing stories on a diverse range of topics anyway. The newscast is heavy on live shots, seemingly with a small cadre of first-rate, experienced reporters.

Under news director Dave Roberts, the station attacks head-on subjects that are often denigrated: WXIA does many stories featuring state legislators, and it covers local institutions at length (twice the national average). And there is Bill Liss, the business editor. Liss is a former top airline executive who looks the part of a tough newspaper columnist.

In market after market these days news departments are running scared. Among evening newscasts, the typical story length is 21 to 30 seconds — almost one in four fall within this range. TV land lives in fear of itchy fingers on

the remote. Your news is not appealing to younger demographics? Well, make it "look like MTV." Is your news not relevant? Maybe the viewer won't notice if wallpaper video flashes by.

But the taciturn Roberts has hired and maintained a veteran staff. The most experienced reporters (six have between 10 and 20 years' experience) invariably turn up in the 6 p.m. broadcast. As with the other three outstanding stations, story length was in the 2-to-3-minute range at WXIA. For some reason, I recall reading a story years ago arguing that the 20-second voice-over piece is akin to racing through a residential neighborhood at 35 to 40 miles per hour. No time for context, only pictures. One can see only the front of a house; there isn't time to peek inside to see more than a façade. The two-minute package, on the other hand, is like stopping and going inside the house to meet the family. Lesson Number Four: Let it breathe.

Robert (Shad) Northshield, who worked at NBC and CBS for years, died recently. Shad came up with the idea of the closing shots on the CBS Sunday broadcast, which were just scenes of nature and natural sound. No voice track, no music. Yet people wrote to the broadcast saying how beautiful was the choice of Vivaldi. This year's four benchmark stations also offer similar suggestions to stem the hemorrhage in viewers. In a sea of change, have the vision to set on a clear course and have the courage to stick to it.

As a newly hired anchor once said, "I know I can win the ratings; it's not rocket surgery."

Marty Haag is Executive Vice President of Content and Innovation for Audience Research & Development, and former Executive Vice President for Broadcast News for A. H. Belo.

METHODOLOGY AND CRITERIA

Newscasts are measured by criteria developed by our design team of local TV news professionals. Stories are coded and scored by Princeton Survey Research Associates. Nielsen Media Research ratings data are interpreted by Todd Belt, a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern California. For detailed information about the methodology and intercoder reliability, see our website: www.journalism.org

AT 6 a.m. IT'S MORNING LITE

BY SUSAN TRUITT

There's no way to make getting up in the morning easy, but local television news tries. Probably too hard. In most cases, cheerfulness and chat outdistance serious news. TV executives think the pre-eminent concern at that hour of the day is knowing whether to dress warmly and which route to drive to work.

For the first time, this year's local news study included half-hour morning newscasts. In TV news' fastest-growing time slot, researchers looked at the half-hour beginning at six a.m. in three cities: Detroit (the ninth largest market in the country), Birmingham (39) and Portland, Maine (80), eight stations in all.

It wasn't a pretty sight from the perspective of the traditional evening newscast. The best broadcast in the study could muster only a grade of B. That went to the No. 2 station in the smallest market reviewed, WGME in Portland. The rest earned "C's" or lower.

Here are some key findings:

- Ninety-four percent of all morning news coverage was reactive, more than local news overall.
- About half the morning news stories used unnamed sources or no sources, compared with a third in other time slots.
- More than half the stories in the morning were about everyday incidents or everyday crime and were not connected to broader issues. That's 15 percent more than the average of all newscasts in the study.

Morning news has a hard time scoring on the quality scale devised for evenings because, by and large, the stations choose to play a different game at that hour — a game that depends on good humor and service delivered in a package with a thin veneer of news.

Does quality sell in this time slot? The results are inconclusive. In Detroit, where all three stations received grades of "C", the highest "C" (WJBK) had the best ratings trend. In Birmingham the results were mixed: the best grade in town was a "D," for WCFT, which had positive ratings, but the "F" station, WBRC, was also thriving.

First and foremost, the decision to put service first translates to "morning news gives the weather." And then more weather. Weather leads every broadcast. The current temperature is constantly on the screen (with a clock) and many stations now run a lower-third crawl updating the forecast frequently.

And it's ever so important to have the right messenger for all this service. My six years of producing morning television reinforced the conventional wisdom that the morning viewer is more likely to let a buddy into the house than some strong authority figure. Most ratings winners follow the "let your buddies help you get ready" formula.

In major metropolitan areas, "service" also includes traffic. In Detroit, weather and traffic make up about 45 percent of the half-hour broadcasts. Combine the cheerfulness and chat of your buddies with weather and traffic and there isn't much time for the kind of coverage that ranks high with the local TV professionals who established the study's quality scale.

Portland stations pay scant attention to traffic and score higher on the quality scale. Rush-hour traffic is not a major factor in Maine so the newscasts in the market have more time for the kind of reporting that the PEJ scale values.

Programming consultant Bill Carroll of Katz Television Group calls the conventional a.m. style "the 'we're-sharing-a-cup-of coffee' approach." Carroll, who has studied the dramatic growth and the content of local morning news over the last five years, says the viewer is the same as for later newscasts "but has very different expectations."

In the age of 24-7 news access, does this conventional wisdom still hold? Maybe not. Consider the growing popularity of no-nonsense Web sites, or business-dominated networks like CNBC.

The truth is that money, not just viewer habits, also explains "morning news lite."

At 6 a.m. in most communities, the number of households using television is about half of what it is at 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. This means stations can charge only a fraction as much for advertising spots in the morning; the difference can be as great as tenfold. At most stations, this translates into fewer resources for morning news than for evening news.

In last year's study we reported on the clear correlation between staff size and news quality. Staff for writing and producing those early morning broadcasts is generally bare bones. And, to add to the producing problems, the staff often includes many inexperienced team members willing to work in the middle of the night to get their start in television.

You get the picture: this small, often very hard-working group gets the broadcasts on as best it can. It fills those half-hours with rewrites of material from the day before, updating with word changes here and there, but without the staff time to really improve or advance the material. And enterprise is the casualty of necessity. A classic example: one morning last February the top-ranked morning newscast, Maine's WGME, kicked off with a high-quality background piece, clearly from the day before, on a popular school superintendent who'd been killed several days earlier in an automobile accident. The next morning's update simply consisted of giving the conditions of the others hurt in the crash and the date of the memorial service.

Of course if there is a big overnight story, many of these early newscasts report it. And in the bigger markets the early reporter will do a live shot. The Fox station in Detroit, WJBK, covered a dramatic overnight robbery of two casino winners on their way home, with a reporter live at 6 a.m. describing the action from one of the locations involved. But more often than not, the early reporter is re-packaging yesterday's news.

At stations that don't join network programming at 7 a.m. (like many Fox stations), morning staff size is often larger. And some staff members work all day preparing special material exclusively for the next day's morning show. But we saw little evidence of that kind of work in the eighty broadcasts studied here.

WGME's morning newscast in Portland stood above the others in this study for three reasons:

■ The station focused 21 percent of its stories on ideas, issues, or policy. That's close to double the average in the overall PEJ study.

■ WGME received an A for its range of topics.

■ And 15% of WGME's stories had three or more sources. That's three times the average of all morning news shows reviewed and it matches the average of those in other time slots.

WGME's 6 a.m. broadcast includes a daily, live call-in segment co-produced with a local talk-radio team. The topics are generally about news stories that are already generating local debate. We heard segments on the high cost of home heating oil, and the propriety of using the nickname "Redskins" for a high school football team. The segment clearly gives voice to a variety of viewpoints and underscores the station's commitment to cover issues with local relevance.

WGME's news director, Ron Wolfe, is on the same track as the news professionals who put the PEJ scale together. I asked him what he thought would help most to improve the a.m. ratings and his answer was short and sweet: "Quality, quality, quality."

WGME, a CBS affiliate, may be doing a strong job of bucking the trend toward "morning lite," but it is struggling in the ratings game against the local competition, WCSH, the NBC affiliate. This may be at least in part the result of its network's failure to come up with a viable early show. WCSH pulled a 55 share of the audience in February to WGME's 15 share. In most markets, the strong ratings of NBC's "Today" appear to give a major boost to the lead-in local morning fare.

But clearly WCSH is doing something right beyond being on NBC.

WCSH's general manager, Steve Thaxton, says his 6 a.m. is the most "attuned" newscast, "well tailored to Mainers." And he proudly points to the 90-plus share the station gets when it goes into full "Stormcenter" mode during severe weather. He calls weather "the ultimate news story" that helps build and keep a high trust level.

But on most days, the 6 a.m. newscast at this Gannett station is pretty standard fare — headlines, a day-old package, lots of weather and a CNBC business report.

There is one unusual element, a daily four-minute, pre-packaged homily produced by the nonsectarian First Radio Parish of America in the middle of the newscast. WCSH, the market's traditional ratings leader, has been airing the "Daily Devotions" segment for decades.

During the last decade, stations discovered that morning was one of the few time slots left with growth potential.

Katz Media estimates that the morning audience has increased by about 20 percent in the last five years. But Carroll, the programming consultant, notes that while many more viewers are now turning on their sets, average ratings for morning news have stayed just about the same.

Stations in at least three large markets — Los Angeles, Chicago and New York — have been successful with audiences by going to highly stylized and somewhat zany formats to meet the multiple demands of local morning news. These stations also bank on attracting viewers beyond the traditional news watcher, people who like a little spice along with the information they need.

Carroll says we should not be surprised if we see more non-traditional elements in the morning newscasts as producers search for ways to "scrap for attention" now that the arena is nearing full size. He adds, "It's not like the winners are already known."

Morning news is . . .

- ✔ FAST-PACED: two-thirds of stories under 45 seconds
- ✔ REACTIVE: only 2% of stories based on in-depth reporting
- ✔ "GLITZY": more pop culture stories than other time slots
- ✔ CAUTIOUS: over 40% of stories about non-controversial events.
- ✔ CHEERFUL: more celebration, how-to, and cooking segments than anyone else.
- ✔ AVERAGE GRADE: C

Susan Truitt, a 30-year TV journalist, successfully fought the local morning news battle at WTTG in Washington as Executive Producer and Producer for 6 years.

NEWS IN PRIME TIME

What's New At 10 p.m.? Not Enough.

BY TOM DOLAN

Reporter Jaime Garza of KCAL in Los Angeles positioned his live shot in El Cajon Pass with care. Not only was it a scene-setter for the 10 p.m. news, but it also helped to explain visually the story of the day and let you know tomorrow's commute might be even worse in the fog.

Garza set up cones at 25-foot intervals to show the distance at which drivers could see one another, in order to dramatize the need to drive under 30 m.p.h to avoid collisions. That day motorists who had been driving at twice that speed caused an enormous pile-up.

Garza showed how the news of the day could be made memorable, not a rehash of the "6 p.m. newscast of record." Unfortunately, from what I see, such imagination is too often lacking in primetime news.

As part of the Project for Excellence in Journalism's 2000 Study, we wanted to see how stations in selected markets used their extra time to produce an hour of local news versus a traditional half-hour. I found newscasts that do not take advantage of extra time for preparation to advance stories, and often fail to come up with new angles to important pieces, or to generate new material targeted to the primetime audience. Here are some exceptions, along with suggestions for fresh approaches.

GOING LIVE IN PRIMETIME

Virtually all markets in the country place a premium on immediacy and the importance of live reporting from the scene. This usually means reporters stand in the dark, or at a crime scene, hours after the story has gone cold. It doesn't have to be that way. KCAL's Garza isn't standing in an empty road. His traffic cone demonstration effectively illustrates what to expect in the next morning's fog.

ANCHOR ROLE IN NEWSCAST

Market research shows that anchors are one of the top reasons people watch local news. It is surprising they are not used as primary storytellers in any of the five markets we studied. All special reporting is handled by reporters.

Stations may want to consider using anchors to report stories, build short background pieces, or do those "smart anchor tags" with useful follow-up information. They might even take advantage of a health or consumer warning to simply stand at the key wall, using graphics to explain why the geography of a story may be important.

NEWS OF THE DAY

The study shows that primetime news programs often failed to use their extra time to initiate investigations, report on investigations by others, or even conduct tough interviews. It also found that almost half of primetime news stories were feed material or prearranged events covered with no on-camera personnel.

You may want to look at "news of the day" with stories angled in a more thoughtful way, one in which audiences are able to recognize the enterprise. This would give viewers a clearer sense of differentiation among competitors, and certainly provide an opportunity to promote the top stories besides "they happened."

In New York, WPIX, WWOR and WNYW all covered the latest in a rash of murder-suicides in the region as a top story. They all appeared to be solid, well-packaged stories. However, all three had live "wraps" with no produced live element. Each seemed a case of the day's events covered without significant new detail. For example, no one went to the dead young man's neighborhood to learn what may have motivated him.

Stations with primetime news should not only take advantage of the extra time within a newscast, they should also employ the four-or-so-hour advantage they have over 6 p.m. news to produce more forward-thinking news. If the story is strong enough to lead with, it should be strong enough to do real "team" reporting.

For example, a WPIX reporter, Mary Murphy, took a story most stations would air as a promo — the sexy appearance of the "7th Heaven" star Jessica Biel in *Gear* magazine — and showed good enterprise. Murphy's well-written piece followed Biel's transition from a minister's daughter on a WB family show — using file tape from an appearance at the toy store FAO Schwarz — to someone who does a sultry spread to change her image for Hollywood. She made a WB station's "mandatory" piece on a WB program into good journalism.

ORIGINAL REPORTING

•**WNYW:** Although there appeared to be little original reporting across the five cities, a couple of stations have committed staff. New York's WNYW produced a good special report on contamination in packaged food at transit-stop restaurants. Reporters traveled to three of New York's major transit hubs and documented the problems on camera. But after one vendor challenged the station to come back once he had cleaned up his act, WNYW failed to make clear whether it intended to do so. When an allegation is aired, a journalist's obligation is to follow up. Not doing so can affect a station's credibility with viewers. The station agrees it may have been "a missed opportunity."

•**WAGA:** Atlanta's WAGA also scored low for enterprise but did some good individual stories. "Shocked," by reporter Dana Fowle, exposed how Atlanta is lax in policing street-lamp vandalism: many lamp pole covers are missing or hanging off their hinges, exposing live wires. This was a great story, well produced and well documented. Fowle interviewed a Philadelphia teen who had almost been electrocuted and then had an expert test the open "hot boxes" using a special device.

But the station also undermined a good effort in two ways. It waited until a short tag after a long story to tell the viewer why these covers were missing: vandals were stealing them to sell for scrap metal. It also teased the temporary solution for part two, when the impor-

tance of the story demanded more treatment the same night.

•**WWOR:** WWOR's Joe Collum produced an I-Team piece to test the N.Y.P.D.'s sensitivity program "Courtesy, Professionalism, Respect." His key finding: twenty percent of callers to the police radio response unit were told to call back. Some were treated with anything but respect. A former Internal Affairs officer posed, in one instance, as a Hispanic caller. One policeman was overheard saying in response: "How come no matter what color the soap is, the suds are always white?" — a racist remark implying that whites will always be in charge. The department responded to the report by saying it would not tolerate this type of behavior by officers. Great assignment and handling by the station as well as gutsy demonstration of enterprise.

SPECIAL TARGET SUBJECTS — USEFUL TO MY LIFE

•**HEALTH:** Most research points to health as a beat that audiences value. With rare exceptions, stations in the study did not commit to it as an important segment.

The exceptions show the potential when a commitment is made. WNYW did a good spot on ear infections from the perspective of what parents should watch for. WAGA investigated a product that promised breast size growth, but an expert warned that tumors might grow from the resulting estrogen stimulation. Another expert stated there is no evidence the device works. Reporter Melissa Jue found that the manufacturer's biology degree is only honorary.

•**MANAGING YOUR MONEY:** The three most popular Web sites on the Internet in prime time are all money related. Meanwhile, viewing is up 20% for business networks CNBC, CNNfn, and Bloomberg. WNYW and WWOR appear to be the only newscasts in the study producing a segment on finance.

WWOR delivered a good enterprise story about Warner-Lambert's merger with Pfizer to form the world's second-largest pharmaceutical company. They sold it to a primetime audience with the connecting copy: "You probably have some of their products in your medicine cabinet, but how will the union of two big companies affect you?"

The WWOR team made it relate by reporting on the merger of the makers of Listerine and Viagra. WWOR dealt with the plight of Warner-Lambert's company town, Morris Plains, N.J., contrasting the fates of employees who would be laid off with the Warner CEO who stood to receive a six-million-dollar golden parachute.

WNYW uses a street.com expert to do market analysis every night, a kind of play by play on where the market is going after a post-mortem on the trading day. It's helpful. The point of view is, "A lot of people are making money, how can you make money too?"

Primetime news is...

- ✔ WELL-SOURCED: 1 in three stories have multiple sources, compared to 1 in 4 nationwide.
- ✔ GENERIC: 30% of stories are feed material.
- ✔ SENSATIONAL: full of stories on everyday crime and bizarre mishaps.
- ✔ POPULAR: 60% are gaining viewers vs. 35% of traditional local news shows.
- ✔ AVERAGE GRADE: C

USING THE INTERNET

National surveys find that many local news viewers begin prime time by scanning their favorite Web sites. If you think of your potential late news audience in that way, you may be able to drive viewers from the Internet to your money segment. How are you addressing what your viewers are doing before the news, to drive them to your broadcast?

Los Angeles's KTLA addresses this issue with a segment called "Kurt Smith, Cyber Guy." One February series put the reporter in a converted bus to demonstrate how to survive for a week using only the Internet. He ordered food, silverware and clothing and proved that the Internet is so diverse you can literally live that way if you want to.

WEATHER

While the study does not grade for weather, why not devote some time or special treatment to weather explainers like the syndicated product "Weather in Motion," or have local graphic artists animate topically driven weather news? You may want to think about producing weather differently with an hour of prime news to give your viewers something value-added versus the traditional half-hour format.

Over 80% of the producers I interview say they watch the NBC "Nightly News," in part because of Robert Hager's explainer pieces. They also appreciate the network's pieces that focus on the impact of breaking news, not just "what happened." Whether it is news or weather, market research and 25 years in local TV news show me that viewers respond to unique content.

ORIGINAL CONTENT

Some stations try to offer an alternative to the six p.m. newscast-of-record approach. But these efforts seem superficial. KMSP in Minneapolis aired a six-minute segment of a kind many stations include to appear hip. "The Buzz" included scenes from a play opening in town, the Disney character Tutter touring locally, Steven Spielberg having kidney surgery, clips from a band playing a benefit concert for missing kids as well as a series of movie trailers.

If you are trying to brand a new product, or trying to develop a new brand of localism, you may want to avoid simple "cookie-cutter" program elements like these, or produce them with your own material. Most of the video appeared to be syndicated or handout. The station says "The Buzz" is its segment to differentiate itself and show its "commintment to the local arts scene."

LOOKING FORWARD

Knowing it is up against primetime news magazines and well-produced entertainment, Fox's KTVI, in St. Louis, has just launched a newscast that will be a "showcase show." News Director Brad Remington says it will utilize several special projects producers to deliver unique content, produced for the time period with a very local feel. The newscast, Remington says, will go well beyond "the 6 p.m. news" and also tell the viewer what to expect tomorrow. So far, the early ratings look good.

Tom Dolan is President of Dolan Media Management. He has also been a vice president at Broadcast Image Group and News Director at WLS TV in Chicago.

Knight Ridder tops this year's diversity list, according to Carl Morris Associates, with four of its newspapers in the top 10 and two others in the field of eight runners-up.

The diversity list is part of CMA's *Year 2000 Newspaper & Television Diversity by Race: A Report on Middle and Upper Management in Newsrooms and Business Offices.*

Our list-leading papers are the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, The Miami Herald, The Philadelphia Inquirer and the San Jose Mercury News, with the Detroit Free Press and The Kansas City Star as runners-up.

"Diversity in the work force – of race, gender and thinking – is essential to Knight Ridder's success. Period."

Tony Ridder
Knight Ridder Chairman and CEO

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Diversity is a core value at Knight Ridder. We are committed to reflecting the diversity of the audiences we serve, including viewpoints and cultures, in our content and in our work forces.

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› Detroit Free Press
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› The Charlotte Observer
› Fort Worth Star-Telegram
› Saint Paul Pioneer Press
› Contra Costa Newspapers
› Philadelphia Daily News
› Akron Beacon Journal
› The (Columbia, S.C.) State
› Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
› The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
› The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
› Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat
› The (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) Times Leader
› Duluth (Minn.) News Tribune
› Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat
› Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer
› The (Biloxi, Miss.) Sun Herald
› The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentinel
› The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun News
› Bradenton (Fla.) Herald
› Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
› The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune
› The Monterey County (Calif.) Herald
› (State College, Pa.) Centre Daily Times
› Aberdeen (S.D.) American News
› Warner Robins (Ga.) Daily Sun
› The Olathe Daily News

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The Lower case

Bush Roars Into Town; Ford Has Stroke

Reuters 8/2/00

Journalists say voters hold key to November election

The Daytona Beach News-Journal 9/13/00

Torch relay runner dies after his leg

The Register-Guard (Eugene, Oreg.) 9/1/00

Drug firm sells 2 lines to rivals

The Philadelphia Inquirer 9/1/00

Francois pleads guilty to killing eight women to avoid death penalty

The Daily Mail (Catskill, N.Y.) 6/22/00

Impeachment of justice could signal changes in high court

The Boston Globe 9/18/00

Varying degrees of criminal sexual conduct now available on Web site

Central Michigan Life 6/14/00

'Big Brother' cast revolting

Press-Telegram (Long Beach, Calif.) 9/10/00

No punishment too harsh for Moose Lake residents

Duluth News Tribune 8/17/00



Republican-American (Waterbury, Conn.) 9/28/00

Candidates for fire chief evaluated

Pizza attacker held

Stars and Stripes 6/1/00

Correction

A report last Sunday about the marriage of Nicole Judith Barth and Neal Andrew Thompson misstated the location of her mother and stepfather's current residence. They live together in Manhattan, not separately in Middlefield, Ohio, and Ridgewood, N.J.

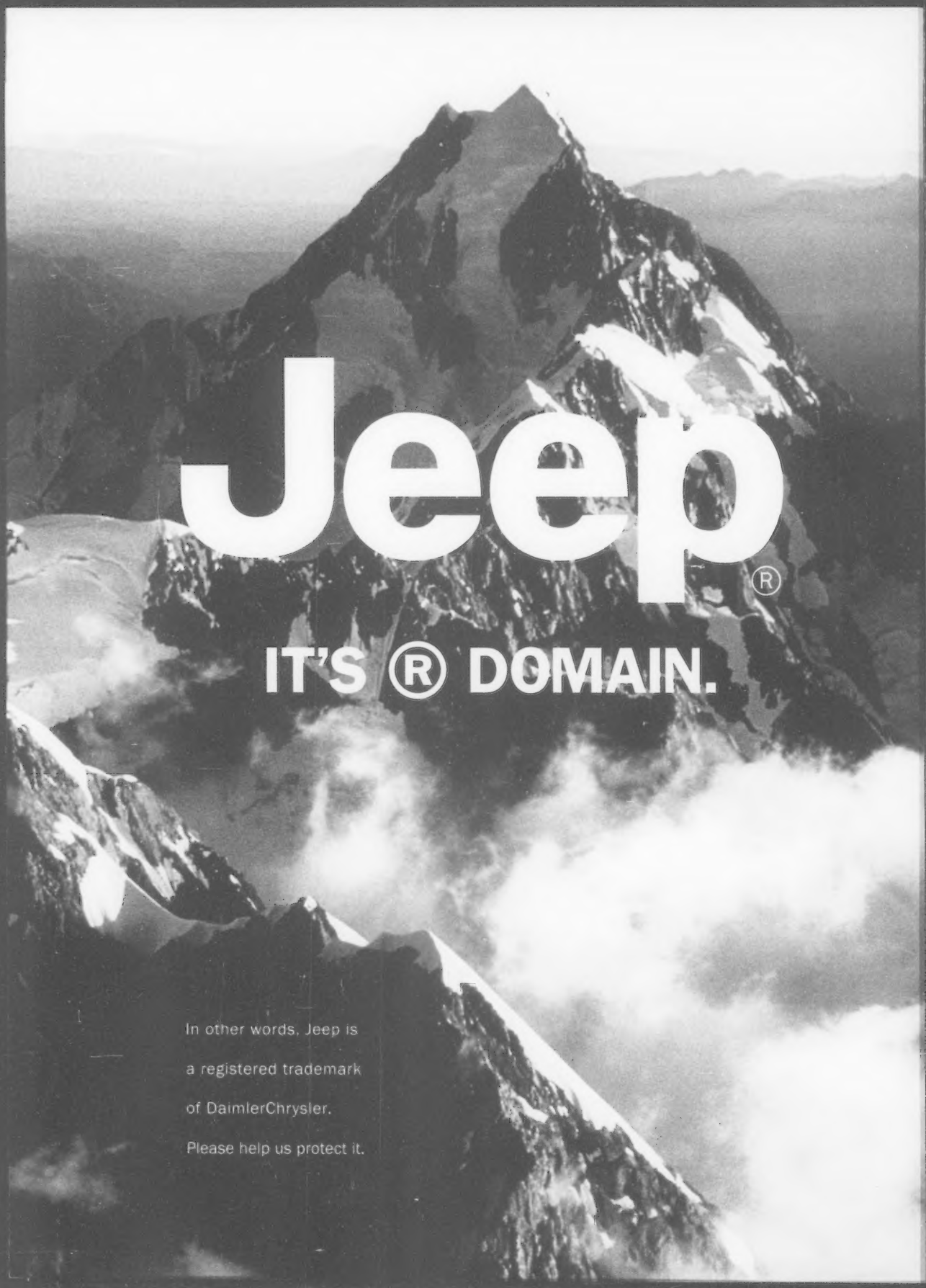
The report also misstated the location of Ms. Barth's first encounter with Mr. Thompson. It was at the home of her mother and stepfather, then in Ridgewood, not at her stepmother's home in Paterson. In addition the report referred incorrectly to the Cape Cod home in which the proposal took place. It is owned by her mother and stepfather, not her stepmother.

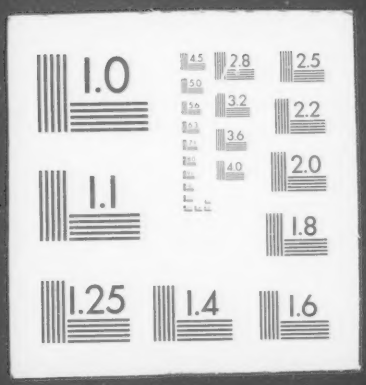
The New York Times 5/11/00

Police oversight group likes San Jose model

Austin American-Statesman 12/21/99

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